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# H O R I Z O N





· H O R I Z O N ·

by

KEN ATTIWILL



INTRODUCTION

By CAPTAIN  
DAVID W. BONE



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TO MOTHER





## N O T E

BEHIND the bedizened scenes, and down in the dressing-room of the chorus in the Great Sailing Company, is a rough but fascinating life among men who would pledge or curse their souls to hell over the assembled bones of all the saints for the sake of a ration of rum. Stripped of its romance, the life is picturesquely unbeautiful – for, inspiring as those tall sails may appear across the distant horizon, in the f’c’sle they are a curse for ever. This book sets out to tell simply of the atmosphere in which a mixed group of men work and play before the mast of a Finnish wind-jammer – incidentally the last square-rigger built by Britain. The f’c’sle has no place for the lily-livered. If one would be received, one must be prepared to drop his squeamishness on the door-mat. If you don’t trust us, then don’t come into our f’c’sle.







## I N T R O D U C T I O N

JUDGED by all the standards, a good book should be one that arouses thought in the reader. It need not be, necessarily, the relish with which one may ponder upon a novel situation adequately dealt with, or upon some confirmation of one's particular views: there is also the searching thought that follows upon distaste as a new and revealing light is thrown upon some manner of life familiar to the reader. With this in mind I have no hesitation in writing an appreciative introduction to *Horizon*, a book to which, on first reading, I responded in a mood of passionate antagonism. But my antagonism was not that of a literary critic, displeased with poor writing. Mr. Attiwill's writing is anything but that, it is sincere and vivid, and my reaction to it may indeed be the greatest of compliments, for my antagonism on turning the last page of his manuscript was that of a sailor suddenly confronted with the honest reflections of a clever and candid commentator upon the way of life at sea. Here indeed, said I, was mud thrown on all my altars, and all I can do about it – on sober consideration – is to agree that there are grounds for the insult.

In this curious way, the strength and virility of *Horizon* is revealed to me. This author makes me think it all over and decide that every line of his book is true to the life, the experiences of a landsman set to hard labour aboard a square rigged sailing ship on an ocean voyage in 1929. Slurring nothing in his effort to represent sea life as it is, he scourges the romantic view, and shews the sailorman as an utterly sordid and obscene creature, loathly in habit and expression. I cannot protest. I can only urge that his book is the sincere expression of a landsman who saw us only through startled eyes, the eyes of a shore dweller suddenly confronted with the primitive in life.

There have been many books written by landsmen concerning experiences in sailing vessels. Generally, these writers identify themselves with the life aboard. They accept it without serious comment upon its wide dissimilarity to communal life on shore. Eager to become at amity with the tribe in the f'c'sle, they glory in the tribal exploits. A good day's sailing run, a fine display of seamanship, a deed or two of individual gallantry, may call for fine description, and the vaunt that runs, as a thread, throughout their narratives is that they, the writers, have been accepted by the warriors, that they have been 'blooded' to the sea. Much too keenly concerned



for the credit of the tribe to write plainly and frankly of what they must have observed, they disregarded the occasional utterances of the healthy seamen (enforcedly celibate males in the company of their kind) and thought our domestic offices in the 'head' as hardly worthy of record.

But Mr. Attiwill will have none of that: he belongs to a newer school, his 'bearings' are almost those of a medical investigator: his perspective is much more faithful to the truth of life at sea than the loyal pictures of other longshore writers. He has drawn us in our habit as we live. Of course, Nils would curse the ship that had left him to drown. In the unforgettable prelude to *Horizon*, this author has touched on the main-spring that governs a sailor's thought about his ship, his unalterable belief in her personality. Nils would curse the ship, and in the exact words that are set down. It is somewhat surprising that one of an alien tribe should come on board, grasp that one significant point, and use it as the keynote of his impressions. That Nils would curse his ship – or the broken ratlin' in his hand that had sent him to his doom – with a peculiar intensity is only remarkable in that the seaman's life lay forfeit to the treachery of a strand: no threat to life in question, a City-bound suburbanite might damn, mildly, the broken bootlace that made him miss his train.

In *Horizon*, the author makes no claim to seamanship, he is always the alien tribesman. He does not criticise the conduct of the ship, the wisdom of the course, the merit of the sailor lore that brought the *Archibald Russell* from Melbourne to Queenstown in one hundred days. How she ever arrived at her port is no concern of his. The ropes, ropes, ropes, that strained his back and coloured his dreams are comparable with the anatomical trips that confuse a first year's medical student. They said 'haul,' and he hauled, and that eleven stone odd of his brought the ship a fraction of a foot the nearer to a landfall. It is all so believable, that I cannot understand why I never saw our scene on shipboard just this way before.

My sailing – as opposed to steaming – days are long behind me, but I do remember that much of the hardship, the cruel hours of overstrain and dread of consequence that I suffered as a working seaman, was distinctly attributable to the shipping of men who were not sailors by upbringing. It was only with difficulty they could be brought to realise that the chicaneries and simulations by which they might have been able to earn a crust ashore were no longer of any use to them and that their only claim to existence lay in their possession of two hands and two feet.

Often, I wondered how sea life would react

upon these landsmen. In all the many books of sea experience written by men bred to adult life on shore I have been unable to arrive at any other understanding than that we are simple souls, companionable, not gravely concerned with the press of landward life. But *Horizon* is much more honest and faithful to the life. We are just as Mr. Attiwill says we are. What a life! What a tribe! But we can sail ships.

DAVID W. BONE



# P R O L O G U E







## PROLOGUE

UNLEASHED from beneath the Antarctic pack ice, a mighty green wave rose in awful grandeur against the tearing, buffeting gale, shook itself into mad, contemptuous rage and – pursued by a storm – sped diagonally northwards with all the force and fury at its command. Upwards and across it raced, mocking at the aimless, glistening drift ice which would check or destroy its progress. Coincidence was at work here – coincidence with the connivance of the Force behind the elements. Of what avail the puny interference of an iceberg? It might wreck ships, yes – crush them and their frail cargoes into nameless fragments and leave them to the evil fancies of the coral-builders and sea lice, the grasping fingers of anemones and yawning bellies of waiting submarine monsters; but, confronted by the elements, it might become meaningless. So upwards and still across sped the wave, gathering relentless power on the way, and leaving a trough of boiling foam in its wake. By late afternoon it was a degree and a half below Tierra del Fuego and had its quarry in sight just a dip below the north-eastern horizon.

\* \* \*

For fifty-three days the barque has battled her way eastwards towards the perilous Cape, and at two bells in the late afternoon of this, the fifty-third day, she stands at roughly fifty-seven south and seventy degrees west, and all ahead is clear.

It is Sunday. Except for the mate, the helmsman, and the policeman, the crew on watch is at ease against the occasional shrilling of the mate's whistle. This is good. *Kristi!* An easy passage around the Horn, and soon the Atlantic and the gentle trade winds. Then far up, beyond the northern horizon – homes, wives, mothers, sweethearts, comfort, warmth! Bit different from this bloody run, with its freezing, tearing gales, howling like devils through shrouds and ropes – with its great rolling breakers crashing like coal-box salvoes over the unprotected bulwarks – with its icy, driving rain and slashing hail. Bit different from this bloody ship, with its eternal, infernal rope and canvas hauling, its cursing, blustering, whistle-sounding mates, its dirt and bad food, its stinking f'c'sle and sodden clothes and bunks. Bit different! So let's get her round, and head her northwards, up to Sweden – up to home! Homeward bound, and all clear ahead——

How profitably might one cast the net of philosophy about the world's wide ocean – changing but unchangeable – and see among his haul an eternal Simile of Life, in fish of a

thousand hues – fish that delight and fish that distress. What an inspiration to awake each morning and find the same broad heaven above, the same wide lonely world around, and the same approachable unattainable horizon before, beckoning, silhouetted against an alluring sky, with the fascinating sea of hazard yet to cross – a sea that is mocking and cruel, for no sooner does it bear the sailor to one horizon than another is out beyond to take its place.

Down in the f'c'sle the crew are celebrating. It is Björn's birthday, and he has managed to catch the *Kapten* in the right mood. A bottle of precious rum from the stores now adorns the f'c'sle table and a score of thirsty tongues surrounds it. It isn't so much that Björn is naturally generous. He hadn't much say in the matter. The f'c'sle to a man smelt out the rum within five minutes of its purchase – a sailing ship at sea is a very insular world. They now stand or sit around the table in a large circle, awaiting events with interest, arms folded and eyes that dance but do not waver. As Björn messes about with the stuff, measuring and making rough calculations, laughter and pornographic wit cut hoarsely, gutturally through the heavy warm stink of tobacco, rum, newly-greased oilskins, and unwashed clothes and men. Björn starts to ration it. About three gulps and a chaser to each man. Not so

bad. The drink begins at Björn, does the round, and ends at Björn. There is yet a healthy ration to spare.

‘Who wants this bloody muck?’ cries the host, thickly and carelessly.

Nobody hastens to voice his greed, lest his chance be struck out on that account.

Björn surveys each in turn. Ah! Those bulging eyes over there look hungriest. He dangles the glass under the big fellow’s nose to goad his thirst with the sweet, strong fumes.

‘See! Would you have it, then?’

‘What would you want for it?’

Björn strikes a thoughtful attitude, and——

‘I have the next wheel turn,’ he says. ‘The sea is as easy as a street harlot, and as smooth running. If you will stand by the wheel for me the drink is for you. Take it!’

Take it! He would sweat there all day for it. The first drink out of port and God knows where the next will come from, and when! He takes the glass, sniffs the contents, grins at his fellows and raises it aloft.

‘*Skall!*’ he gloats.

The crew silently watch it disappear, drop by drop. . . .

Four bells sound from the wheelhouse. The last drinker sways contentedly to the f’c’sle head, echoes the helmsman’s bells on the big magis-



terial tocsin, and returns aft to the wheel. The crew go to their bunks – the port watch to sleep until two bells, the starboard men to lounge and wait. They barely have time to roll their cigarettes before the mate's whistle shrills. Two blasts! And a lot more after those. Starboard watch on deck.

The *Kapten* and three mates are on the poop. *Satan förbannat och Fe Fan!* Must be something wrong, something big, to bring *Kapten* up after his coffee on a Sunday. Orders, and a glance at the horizon, show them the reason. From the southward fly the storm swallows, darting and swooping wildly onward. Down there the sky is black, menacing and ugly, and below it the skyline is uneven. Big sea there. Storm, it looks like. *Djevil!* isn't that just the luck on a Sunday, a free day. Free? Yes, free like every other thing aboard! Storm! That means sail must be shortened. Less speed – longer to home – more work – more ropes – more canvas hauling – more blustering——

'*Vara på rojeln! . . . slack away, scoot . . . halaway, gordingar . . . Leggo scoot! . . . Aho! . . . Aha! . . . Ahe! . . . Hal away, hal away, klämm i! . . . Put some goddam guts into it like men! . . . Litet mera . . . hal away . . . lite' till . . . make fast . . . opp and make fast! . . .*'

The harsh Swedish orders fly about the ship, spat out by the *Kapten*, snatched up and hurled

on to the men by the mates with a little of their own added. Down come the royals, followed by the upper top-gallants. Then all, including the *Kapten*, concentrate on the herculean task of hauling up the huge mainsail, all six-hundred-and-thirty stiff, icy, sodden square yards of it, and making it fast to the mainyard. By this time the gale has increased in force, the ship is toiling in the outer fringe of the oncoming storm. The sails that yet stand are stretched like swollen bellies – big, white, naked things that tremble ever so slightly as the little ship tosses, ducks, and slithers down into the trough of the waves. The free watch has been called out from its slumber.

Everywhere ropes are screaming through pulley-blocks, and men heave and curse with panting breaths. There is a shout from ahead, followed by a stampede as the whole crew surges along the deck. The sheets of both the flying and outer jibs have worked loose. The flying jib has blown to hell and the other flaps viciously in the gale.

‘Down haul!’

More heaving and panting. The second jib is saved, and the other two come down also.

‘Out and make fast!’

The men hang back. Not one among them who would not spit contemptuously at danger. Not one of them a coward. But out there the jib-boom is dipping deep into the high-tossing waves, and

it means an icy ducking. So each man hangs back, as brave men will, waiting for the leader. Two men are wanted.

‘Out and make fast, you shivering bastards!’

Björn’s face pales and his eyes gleam. He springs forward and slaps the taunter’s both cheeks, leaps over the short railing, and climbs out with hands and feet that know their places. Kristof follows. Their task is difficult, for the ship is rolling and tossing like a crazy cork in a boiling cauldron. The two men are soaked to the skin before they are out to the end to start their job. It is a marvel that they hang there. But the rule of the tall ships is ‘one hand for the ship and one for yourself’ and the sailor must see to it that the hand for himself is strong.

Björn utters a string of the foulest oaths. That bloody rum! If he hadn’t traded it away, he would be at the wheel now, instead of Gustav, and he would miss this devil’s work of the storm. *Kristi förbannat!* what a mistake, what a dirty coincidence!

Kristof laughs and spits into the sea with grand contumely. It relieves them both, and they work on like madmen, lashing the gaskets wherever they will hold to make haste, and crawling all round the dripping boom. The rest of the crew have gone aft again to attend to other sails.

\* \* \*

The wind has changed, and the course of the ship is altered a quarter-point farther south. The elements chuckle. The wind-change will do it, will bring that mighty green wave from the south a few seconds nearer – nearer to the quarry. The wind-change will do it; there shall be no bungling of this affair, this jest. Now the wave is on the horizon, and sweeping up towards the little barque. Bören sees it coming, and lets out a great rough cry:

‘Take your corks, boys, and tighten your trousers. Here comes a packet of salts that would shift the devil from hell!’

Björn and Kristof do not hear the warning: nor do they see the malevolent green monster that bears down upon them. They are working and swearing too hard to take note of the scenery. Their task is almost finished – another few seconds will see it through, and they will swing in along the boom, back to the safety of the deck. Blazes! The strong wind has hampered their work, and now Björn’s benumbed fingers have difficulty in making the stiff rope fast to the lashing, whereat he swears it illegitimate, and goddams it from hell to Christendom . . .

It is inevitable. On sweeps the wave, and crashes with shattering force across the full length of the ship, breaking high up almost to the mainyards. A sickening, dreadful shiver runs

from stem to stern and from keel to topmast. Lucky Bören saw it coming. Now the deck men all cling safely, though swamped, to the taut lifeline. But for his rough cry they would have been taken by surprise and swept overboard. The damage . . . but nobody takes thought of that. Something else has happened? What's that? The warning comes from the cook, who is on the foredeck.

'Two men o'board,' he shrieks, gesticulating wildly to the port side. 'The Bear, the Bear! And Kristof!'

'Port side! Rope!' cries another hoarsely.

Those on deck rush across. Ropes are everywhere after the rapid sail shortening, buntlines and clewlines in confusion about the deck. These are snatched up and flung overboard.

Björn and Kristof are down there somewhere in that heaving, hissing sea of treachery. Six hands couldn't have held them to the jib-boom against the force of that mighty wave.

'Oh Christ! Oh Christ! Help them reach it! Bear, Bear! See! Kristof, here is rope! Where are you, for Christ's sake?' A torrent of demented shouting, imploring, cursing, comes from the men at the side.

At last the two heads appear for a moment in the trough, almost against the side of the ship. There is nameless fear in the eyes of both. They

shriek and babble, lashing about with their arms, and tearing the nails from their fingers on the iron sides of the ship in their dreadful efforts to reach safety. The ropes and lifebelts are down, but the ship is moving quickly, at twelve knots. Björn and Kristof clutch wildly at the ropes as they at last see them, but too late. In a moment the next wave is upon them and sweeping them from sight. When next they re-appear above the water they are farther out, and the ship is almost past them. It is useless to do anything but just watch their hopeless clawings. Impossible to reach them now with the ropes – impossible to put out a lifeboat, and anyway it is smashed to pieces by that wave. See, the ribs are floating about the submerged deck – impossible for Björn and Kristof to swim after the ship against such waves.

No! The hazardous course of ships and men lies only ahead, and there can be no retracing of the wake. Those two must lash about back there in ghastly, puny frenzy until they are exhausted, and sink. It won't be long in such a sea. The agony can't last long. But while it does. . . .

\* \* \*

The tidal wave has passed, and now tumbles northwards. Soon it will break its great back vainly against the deserted rocks of Tierra del



Fuego. Even now it is but a distant smudge against the rim of the world where sea and sky meet. Björn and Kristof are gone, and no sound is heard from their grave – no funeral march plays them away, except the song of the sea as it ‘beats its solemn measure, steadily swinging when the solo or duet of human life began, and to swing just as steadily after the human chorus has died out and man is a fossil on its shores.’





## C H A P T E R I

Two mornings ago the door of our cabin opened suddenly, and there entered a powerful, well-built, rather handsome Swede, whose newly-acquired red beard stuck out defiantly in flaming antagonism to his very fair hair. He pulled out a pipe and contentedly sank his broad behind on a form. He looked at me for a full minute, and then lit his pipe. He often comes thus in the free watches. Sometimes we chat. He knows a little English, and I by this time have a snatch of Swedish.

‘Nils,’ I said. ‘Can you tell what you would do if a big wave came up and pitched you overboard and you were left there watching the ship go away, and knew there was no hope of being saved?’

He scanned me earnestly for a few minutes. He spat.

“At vould I do?” he echoed, very slowly, crossing his knees and staring at them. Quaint English he speaks, slightly laboured and wholly fascinating. The words tumble out by twos and

threes. 'I vould say – fook dat shep – 'at you mean? – leaving me – o'board – like dis? – *Djevil!* – Go on, go on! – I hope vat you – sink – now – bawsted shep!'

He said this so deliberately, so intensely, that I firmly believe he has thought it all out, and has prepared for such an emergency. And I firmly believe, too, that if that emergency arises, he will do just as he told me. Nevertheless, it has given me a shock. I wish I had something of that contempt for death – that superiority over environment. I have pictured myself left overboard like that, and it simply did not occur to me that anyone, so placed, might turn animistic and accuse an inanimate ship of vindictive motives. I have imagined myself gazing hopelessly at my past life, and praying violently.

I have recorded Nils's speech, crude as it is, for the sole reason that in its naïve simplicity it is the most accurate and faithful picture that I can draw of this big-hearted, fearless sailor. When he gave his answer thus, I did not laugh at its coarseness, but instead pondered its philosophy. I have had a few days to think about it. It has taught me a lot about being a sailor.

\* \* \*

We are bowling along under full sail in the Roaring Forties at something like twelve knots. Walker's taffrail log tells us that since noon

yesterday we have left 180 miles in our wake, and as the barometer points to a continuance of fair weather, we shall probably do another fifty miles before noon to-day.

Gösta, our youngest apprentice, tells me that this is 'bloody no good,' that the mechanism of the log is up to mud, and that even now the barometer would show there was a storm coming up if something hadn't crawled in there and died. Probably a bug, as far as I can understand of what Gösta is telling me. It is feasible, I admit. There are bugs crawling everywhere – fleas, cockroaches, and other friendly unmentionables – and no thing and no place is inviolate. So I suppose there's no reason why a bug shouldn't crawl into the barometer if he wants to. Probably two, since most creeping things in this world seem always to go in pairs. Not that I mind. As long as the little brutes don't crawl into my bunk and produce crops of antagonistic youngsters, they can have all the fun they want, even at the expense of the barometer. But it is just what Gösta would suggest. That sixteen-year-old kid has a brain like a choked sewer.

When I came aboard the barque three weeks ago, he knew nothing of English or French, and I had nothing of Swedish or Finnish. Now we both know a little of each, and can converse for seven and a half minutes, without repeating ourselves

except in certain words in the 'a' to 'f' category.

Gösta and I are f'c'sle mates, and share the apprentices' cabin. Ek, the apprentice cook, is in with us, too, but we don't see much of this slimy little Finn.

We have just come off watch, and have finished toying with breakfast – a plate of sodden porridge and preserved meat balls, of which there is no better description than the single term everybody employs; but we eat them with a relish nevertheless. It is like that with all the food. There are about ten changes on the entire menu and each dish is known by a disgusting simile. Most of it comes under the same monosyllabic term. Our food is an unhappy feature, contorted into three times seven diabolical complexions each week. Heaven and the steward alone share the grim secret of what it is we eat, and untrustingly we eat it because our stomachs have need of it to generate sufficient horse-power within us to sail the ship.

When Britain built her – (Scott's, Greenock, 1905) – she was provided with accommodation for a crew of thirty sailors. We are now under the Finnish flag, and are twenty-two, including the captain and three mates, steward, and apprentice cook. About four of the crew had too much of a good thing on the trip from Europe to Australia, and jumped the ship at Melbourne.



That, I think, is why the captain took on the Cockney (whose nick-name aboard, Jack London, will serve for this account), the Frog from St. Malo, and myself as passage workers.

London had gone to Australia, like so many other unfortunate Englishmen, with startling illusions about a Promised Land and the vast fortunes to be easily made therein, but with no idea of the Australian temperament, and very little adaptability. This is why so many migrants, especially those from England, fail in Australia. The 'essential Englishman' has a temperament unelastic and deep-rooted, ingrained through generations of sameness. Everything is judged by English standards. And nothing is more odious than this to the Australian. My advice to the Englishman going to Australia to live (and the advice I gave to Jack London after he had tried and failed) is that he should forget all about England for a year. Then, and only then, might he succeed.

The Frog had gone to Australia because a ship bore him there. He left Australia because the four-masted barque *Archibald Russell* has carried him away from it. On his own confession he is a naval deserter, a gaol-bird, a rogue, and an independent citizen of the world. He has also a good knowledge of English, a very thorough Esperanto of foulness in expression, a quick

illogical brain, a pair of useful hands, a cock-eyed conceit, an ugly face, and lewd tattoo markings from bum to breakfast-table.

I am in the f'c'sle because, being young, I am also inquisitive. It was brought under my notice, in Melbourne a month ago, that this ship was to sail seven days thence, that several of the crew had deserted, and that the skipper was to be found in a tractable mood after his evening coffee. I went down to the port of Williamstown, Port Phillip Bay, and found him not only at home, but also willing to sign me on the crew. I paid as many debts as prudence would allow, went home to Adelaide and wept a farewell on my family's shoulder, and sailed within a week of meeting the kind-hearted friend who gave me the nod. In my seabag I carry £8 10s. and plenty of good letters of introduction. This is not heroic. It is merely just damned silly. A man only does these things when he is young. I want to see the world, and have no money.

\* \* \*

We are working on the four, five, and six hours' watch. This alters our hours each day, the system being: First day – on from midnight to four a.m., free to eight a.m., on to one p.m., free to seven p.m., on to midnight – fourteen hours on and ten hours off. Second day – free from midnight to four a.m., on to eight a.m., free to one

p.m., on to seven p.m., free to midnight – ten hours on and fourteen hours off. And so it goes alternately. The second day is the best. It gives one more time to scratch out the crawling things, to attend to one's various little affairs, to get warm or cool – according to the ship's position on the globe – to reflect on the evils of romance and the sea and wind-jamming, and to sleep. I do mostly the latter two.

This porridge stuff sits heavily on the stomach. Gösta, with wisdom born of experience, has a chest full of old newspapers, books and magazines. Most of it is unsuitable for the purpose for which he intended it. But on turning over the pile, I have found an old copy of *Rob Roy*, printed on soft, thin paper. I had never read it before, so decided to do so during the trip. I am reading it now in serial form. As soon as I have finished my breakfast, or whenever else needs must, I tear out four leaves, take them to the small sitting-chamber up for'ard, and read and dispose of them. The classic is thus serving a double purpose to me.

As I walk along the deck with to-day's installment under my arm, I feel a sprightliness and satisfaction with all things generally – absent from my heart for many days. Why I should feel thus I cannot tell, but I am glad, for I was beginning to grow morbid and depressed. Useless this, as we might be months at sea before we

touch port. We are bound for Queenstown or Falmouth for orders. The average time of the wind-jammer over this voyage, which is via Cape Horn, is 120 days. Unless we are wrecked, there will be no stopping-places on the way. Horrible thought! Get to hell out of my mind, and stay out.

My sojourn this morning with *Rob Roy* occupies half-an-hour, and is entirely successful. This is what Jack London, who hates the food and its unhealthy effects as much as I, describes as 'that grand and glorious feeling.' Having sent Scott to the Pacific fishes, I feel better, and come out on deck again.

Outside I meet Gösta buttoning his breeches with a sour expression on his face. He has just vacated the opposite chamber.

'Any luck, Puka?' I inquire, sympathetically.

'*Nez*. Dis bawsted shep!' He speaks in a deep voice. His development in proportion to his years is extraordinary. All the Finns and Scandinavians aboard are inclined this way. Youngsters in years and mentality they are, but otherwise giants of men. I suspect the presence of a book on 'Aids to Manliness for Finnish and Swedish Sailors.'

'Well, don't let it worry you, Puka,' I tell him. 'I've got two more big bottles yet. We'll have another shot to-night. You'll get a Number

Eighteen to-night. And then after that we shall keep doubling until she budes. In the meantime don't eat that stinking salt meat junk or the blah-blah.'

At first young Gösta scorned my proffered medicines, but I have threatened him with *beri beri*. He's already pocked through salt-meat boils. This has brought him round. Such matters as this shed their shamefacedness in the wind-jammer f'c'sle when men must eat and sleep together with nothing but horizon after horizon ahead of them for eighty, ninety, a hundred, perhaps two hundred days. No taboos, no poisonous prudery here. Nothing is private except that other half of their thoughts which men keep to themselves. And maybe they, too, will leak out before we have done. There are fifteen thousand miles to go yet.

\* \* \*

This morning sun is glorious. It beckons me up topside to the f'c'sle, where there is a warm patch shining on the wave-washed deck. I bask in it, prone, with my folded arms tilting my head, and gaze out before me. I feel again, as I felt the day we weighed anchor in Port Phillip, something of the thrill of the wind-jammer. Violent sea-sickness lasting two nights and a day robbed me of the first thrill. But now it is returning. There is a tranquillity about the unthrob-

bing deck of these engineless ships that, when the weather is fair and the wind good, cannot be equalled anywhere else afloat or ashore. To-day it is like this. No noise, except for the work which the port watch, now hard at it, is engaged upon. They are scraping teak on the poop preparatory for re-oiling and varnishing. Devilish row when the free watch is trying to sleep, but up here it doesn't matter. The only sounds that one is conscious of are those of the steady zooming of the wind about the rigging and sails, and the swish-swish hissing of the water as our bows cut through. We are loaded to plimsoll with grain, and our course through the water is heavy, but none the less graceful. Skimming high on the crest of one huge wave, we glide swiftly down a valley – the trough of two towering green giants. I am near the windward railing, and the spray as the waves crash against us goes over my head. Dolphins or porpoises fool about in the cutwater, leaping here and darting there so that it is difficult to follow any particular one more than a few yards. Outside the strong wind is whipping the wave-crests into fine mist, which catches and reflects the sun's rays in a barrage of rainbows. Neptune often shows me his fine jewels when he and I are alone and unobserved.

Twelve to thirteen knots – steady going – on to Cape Horn – those glorious tropics that I hear



so much about – England – Europe – the whole world lies before me. . . .

But it is queer. Here am I, bound for England or Ireland, with three weeks, over three thousand miles, dead behind me, and Cape Horn not far ahead now. But I might just as well be sailing in circles outside Melbourne Heads for all the effect of movement it has. Horizon, nothing but horizon – so full of promise – but so vaguely distant and mocking. . . .

\* \* \*

F'c'sle, or forecastle, was originally the name given to the forepart of the ship under the main deck, the quarters of the crew. But nowadays the quarters of the crew may be in any part of the ship and still be known colloquially as the f'c'sle. Most of our crew bunk in a deck-house immediately for'ard of the mainmast. The Swedish name for this is *skans*, meaning 'cabin,' and by its use I am able to avoid confusion.

This question of terminology of the ship is very important. Every infernal thing has a name, and when a man is sailing before the mast he is required to know all these names. For in a storm or other sudden emergency, one has to be quick to obey orders. That is, if one is not a born sailor who knows what to do without having to be told. I am not one such. The captain doubts if I ever shall be. I have no doubts. Definitely I shall not.



Neither will Jack London. When we came aboard, neither of us knew anything of a sailing ship beyond that it sailed, somehow. At first we were like a couple of sheep following the others about, because all the orders are in Swedish, and when it is dark and there's a storm raging the mates have no time to waste translating for our particular benefit. London is with the port watch, which carries with it the chief mate and the third mate. I am on the starboard watch, superintended by Andrastyrman, the second mate.

London and I have many jokes about the Swedish pronunciation of English. 'T'ird mate is a damned good name for him, but I ain't heard it spelt that way before,' he says.

It was doubly difficult for us at first to do any effective work about sailing the ship, because we understood neither the Swedish orders nor their equivalent in English. It was all so confusing.

Take, for instance, the running gear. Rope, rope, rope, and still more rope – miles of it – and every single rope has got a name. It hangs everywhere like giant spiders' webs, and ranges in thickness from cord-rope to whacking great stuff that would kill a man if it fell on him. This is used for towing purposes, and is roughly six inches thick.

Three-quarters of my waking time is devoted to fondling rope – untying it, tying it again,

pulling it up, pulling it down, heaving it, doing forwards - upwards - sideways - downwards physical jerks with it, or else quoiting it neatly on pegs along the bulwark railings and around the masts. We have no winches, except one wheezy affair used for the anchor in conjunction with a man-handled windlass, and all our sails have to be hauled by hand or heaved by capstan. For the first two weeks of the trip I suffered wretchedly from a rope complex. The thing became a nightmare to me. I used to awake from horrible ropey dreams to find my arms and shoulders twitching as though I were still pulling rope. During the whole of the second week I had a terrific physical repulsion for all shapes and sizes of rope. Rope surrounds me at every turn. If I am in one part of the ship and am called by the mate to another part for some odd job, it generally transpires that somewhere, sometime, during the execution of that job, a piece of rope will become not only desirable, but necessary. Often in the free watches I realise, with a horrible sinking feeling, that in my abstraction I am toying childishly with a silly piece of rope. And if I should suddenly tear down any piece of rope that persistently annoys me, somebody would slink along and put another piece in its place. For there are miles and miles more rope down among the stores, just itching to come forth and be

pulled. The dreadful irony of it! If a man had a sudden passion to end all, he might search for hours without finding a suitable medium. Yet just because I don't want to hang myself, here in this blasted ship is a rope to fit every neck God ever made.

\* \* \*

Most ships are supposed to rejoice in a smell of bilgewater, tar, and a foetid atmosphere generally. If it is true of some it isn't true of ours. The *Archibald Russell*, although only ninety-five metres in length and twelve metres in greatest breadth, has a far more scattered conglomeration of atmospheres. The rank perfume of Stockholm tar permeates most quarters, of course, but as I walk the length of the ship, there are many aspects. Starting aft, whereunder the captain and mates have their being, my nose is assailed by a smell for all the world like that of a large, overripe plum pudding. Perhaps this is because our Finnish steward sleeps here. I have never yet seen him wash himself. These aft quarters cover a multitude of sins and tins. Down below is the steward's store-room. There is a musty smell of salt meat, bully, fish preserved in ammonia and odoriferous, several very dead sides of pig, flour-bags piled high, fermenting fruit and vegetables, and miscellaneous groceries. Next to this junk is the sail-locker. Any individuality this might have

possessed has long since been eclipsed by the powerful waves from the food stores. Passing out into God's pure air on the quarterdeck, one is hit in the nose by a sudden gust of something escaping from the officers' water barrels. Ah yes! These water barrels have been appropriated by the steward for the housing of more salt meat. This is a maturer vintage than that down below. This lot died in America five years ago, and is now undergoing a painful resurrection. We eat this.

Past the aft hatch is a deckhouse, divided into two small cabins. That on the port side is for apprentices, and the starboard division is for the sailmaker. These cabins are the tail-end of the crew's f'c'sle quarters. After Gösta and Ek the cook and I have smoked in our cabin and slept in it, it becomes as stinking as it is lousy. None of us has had a complete wash since leaving Melbourne. The water ration will not allow indiscriminate washing.

Past the maindeck is the donkey-room. This smells like a donkey-room. Bang up against it is the galley, or *kabyss*. It has all the usual characteristics of a rubbish dump. Next in line is the main *skans*. This stinks worse than ours. A dozen unwashed men sleep here. It smells, looks, and is, filthy. Ahead of this again, planted up against the f'c'sle, is the pigs' pen. It shrieks for itself. There are two white pigs. From the mawkish

squealing when the canvas flap is pulled over the front of their pen it would seem that they spend the entire night either fighting or fornicating – I haven't bothered to determine which of the two. In the mornings they are allowed to wander at will – a loathsome custom, as they have been educated to low habits, and leave their foul doings all over the ship. . . .

The pigs' pen is cleaned out each morning before breakfast. This is Morty's job. Thank heaven it isn't mine. I don't mind eating an occasional bit of what the steward puts in front of me, but it is rather too much to have to muck about with it after it has passed through the pig. I hate the bloody swine alive, and I feel convinced that when the steward has finished with them I shall hate them dead with equal intensity.

There is also a cat. Friendly little thing, but it has a grotesque habit of messing in one's bunk. I wish there were a dog aboard.

\* \* \*

'*Stig opp!* *Stig opp!* Cummon boys, roust up. One bell!'

The world is afire with the rich red glow of departing day. The sun stands out defiantly from the clouds, and they blush crimson before his grand, tyrannical flourish. Even the vast slow-heaving ocean reflects here and there the sky's shamefaced demeanour.

The warning-bell for the new watch has gone. It is echoed by the big bell on the f'c'sle with a more insistent summons. Twenty minutes past six. We must go on at seven. We have been free since lunch, and have slept all afternoon. This followed a swishing, water-logged morning of rain, squalls, big seas, and plenty of rope and canvas tugging. There was a meagre lunch. I am ravenously hungry, and – paradoxically – fed up. Confounded bells that will not be denied. When the notes of the tocsin are heard – and no devilish storm in the seven seas could drown them – it is 'bells' and you have to spring to it. If all is plain sailing and the new watch can alone carry on the good work, the retiring watch is dismissed, and the men scramble for their food. But sometimes in this rough weather the work is considered too much for one gang, and the poor devils who have exhausted their guts in their own watch must work on, sometimes halfway into what should be their free watch. At such times they can go to hell for their free-time and their sleep. They must come out for the next watch at the usual hour, whether they have had no sleep or whether they have snored for five hours. This is a favourite trick of Andrastyrman, under whom we work. Many times unnecessarily, at the finish of our watch, he reports aft that he is willing to work on – a willingness which involves



his watch also. He has two reasons, conceit and spite. He imagines his presence on deck is invaluable and indispensable to the ship's safety. Then again he is hotly disliked and knows it, and by working us on he gets a little of his own back. This gentleman comes from Åland, and is what is known among Scandinavians as a 'Baltic Sea Jew.' To the crew as a whole he is more popularly known as Andrastyrman, alias The Bastard. He lives close to the devil and is one of those who develop colloquial illegitimacy as their years and small status advance. The main reason for his unpopularity is that on the trip from Larvik to Melbourne he had trouble with one of the young high-spirited Swedish apprentices. His revenge was to order the boy down the peak for coal duty, and to follow him down the ladder. The peak is below the f'c'sle, some twenty feet down. No sooner was the Andrastyrman on the ladder above the boy than he kicked him savagely in the face, literally trod on him. The poor kid dropped to the bottom, half stunned and badly gashed. For this the mate received an anonymous thrashing in Melbourne. So that on the trip home I find myself in a hotbed of intrigue and counter-intrigue. The mate plans to work the men to a standstill, and the men are scheming to drop the mate overboard some dark and stormy night.

*'Stig opp!'*



There is a crash at our *skans* door and twelve stone of Swede enters with a yell. This is Pittson. We must raise up, he says. He brings us the latest Finnish interpretation of a meal. Often one is dozing fitfully, trying vainly to convince oneself that it is only four bells when quite evidently it is fast approaching six of the wretched things. The door is wrenched open, and that unsympathetic voice shouts its '*Stig opp!*' 'Raise up, raise up!' Horrible voice. It sounds like my old Sunday-school teacher giving us the first hoarse notes of a hymn-tune. 'Raise up, raise up!' He disappears. The waker watches him go and with a grunt settles in his bunk again. But there is hardly time to get one's hand to a warm spot before back comes the policeman with another yell, at the same time hurling down on the table some dish containing God only knows what deliquescent horror. One tumbles out and pulls on those salt-sodden wet clothes and oilskins again, opens the door to spit and micturate, crams a rotten poultice into his stomach and, with a nasty taste in the mouth, goes out to pick up the dropped threads of the old round once more – painting, scraping, scaling, sail-piddling, rope-hauling, capstan-heaving, and a thousand other things which require no intelligence but only muscle and brawn, muscle and brawn, muscle and brawn. . . .

'*Vad ar* to eat, Pittson?' I enquire.

'Whit!' he answers expressively. I have often wondered how an English-speaking Swede would frighten away a broody hen, for he is somehow unable to say 'shoo.'

'I know that, old man. But how's it cooked?'

'*Putt i panna,*' he informs me.

'Oh to hell with bilge,' I growl, and gaze across at young Gösta for support.

'Bawsted whit, *putt i panna,*' he nods. He wants to know our speed. 'How many meels?' he asks Pittson.

'*Nio.*'

Blast it! Only nine. When we finished watch at lunch, it was twelve. Still, nine is a good average.

We eat. The coffee and bread and margarine are good, at least. We are rationed on margarine and sugar – about a jam tin full of each, given out every Friday. It is generally finished two or three days before Friday. The steward will never give us any to go on with. The only thing to do is snitch it from some idiot who has left his about. Condensed milk is also rationed. We get a tin and a half each week in our *skans*. This is for five men.

\* \* \*

Our hasty meal is over. Eight bells crash out, and we go to the quarterdeck and sit on the hatch.

The men of the other watch are there, too, on the port side of the hatch. The chief mate peers down until he is satisfied we are all there. There is a short wait until the big, clumsy carpenter arrives. He is full of a vast self-importance and invariably arrives late, so as to create an impression. Were he not so big and strong he would have an impression of a different kind – one that could be seen. This giant lives apart from the rest, in one of the poky forecabins, next to the closet.

*‘Los av ror och utkik. Vell frivakt,’* chants the chief, meaning to say, ‘relieve wheel and look-out. Well, free watch.’ The port watch scrambles galleywards and those of us who have look-out, wheel, or police, go to our posts. The rest of us go back to loll on our *koj* (bunk), roll a cigarette, and await our turn or Andrastyrman’s whistle. These turns occupy an hour each for look-out, police, and wheel. They run in that order. It is a good arrangement. After a freezing hour on the f’c’sle, looking out for ships, icebergs, stray islands, or other obstructions, and another freezing hour policing the decks, one is almost a corpse down here in the South Pacific. But then follows wheel. It is a tough proposition in a big sea, and we get plenty of those in these parts. After an hour of it, one is warm and sweating and can go to his bed more or less comfortable. It will probably be

hellish in the tropics, but it is pleasant in the land of the ice and the snow.

I am free until two bells. It is as cold as a frog in a deep shady pool to-night, so I return to our *skans*. The Big Three are eating – Bertil, the sailmaker, Pittson and Erik. Swedes all three, and sons of gentlemen, here only for the practical sailing ship time necessary for them to get their Swedish officers' tickets. Sons of gentlemen, and sometime gentlemen themselves. But now they are toughened, and their manners roughened. Bertil and Erik I like, and these are my best friends in the ship. Pittson and I are pleasant to each other, but I don't like him and have a sneaking suspicion he doesn't like me.

Erik is toying with the *putt i panna*. It is an enigmatic dish and has no equivalent in English menus. A vile mixture, all jumbled haphazardly and cooked together, of potatoes, rice, bully, and – but what's the use. Erik gnaws it and washes it down with coffee. He has enough on his plate to fill a camel.

'Erik, my good friend, you surely can't do it,' I say. 'Have you no greater regard for your stomach than this, that you insult it with that coagulated mess?'

'*Nez,*' he replies, comprehending dimly. 'If you are sitting nineteen days without food, you are t'inking dis are a very fine food.'

‘You bloody sybarite, Erik! What do you think of it, Bertil?’

‘Whit!’

Pittson doesn’t join the conversation. His jaws are otherwise engaged, pounding away like pistons. This large lad takes his nourishment after the manner of the pelican, and it is astounding to see the huge hunks of things he can bolster into his broad beak and still chew on.

The policeman comes to the door and beckons me.

‘Second officer would speak med you aft.’

I go. Up on the poop is his silhouette against the lighter black sky. The wind is keen still, but the moon sheds a gentle glow of silken opaqueness around an obtruding cloud, softening Nature’s unkindnesses. Watching it, there comes to me such a feeling as to one who, shivering, enters an unlighted room wherein a glowing broad hearth appears in crimson flickers around the extremities of a deep chesterfield. There is such a one in the home that I have left. I want to fly to the moon. Instead, I clump my awkward seaboots up the ten steps leading from the quarterdeck to the poop.

‘Hello,’ greets Andrastyрман, too pleasantly to be convincing. I don’t like him and don’t trust him, and make no effort to conceal my attitude. He is outwardly very affable, for I am brushing

up his English, in which he takes more pride than is warranted. His English is poor, and always will be, for he is conceited about it. He comes under the category of those who know not, and know not that they know not. As the old sage tells me, 'he is a fool; let him be.' I am teaching him solely to study the man and pick what sea brains he possesses. Fortunately for our relations he is unaware of this fact.

'It iss nice an' varm dis night,' he lies. This is usually his opening speech, rain or shine. Always as he speaks, I recognise passages from his exercise books – he makes no effort at originality of thought or of expression, but offers those chosen bits to me in the same manner as he might put forward his considered opinions. Useless to try to teach him anything.

'Rubbish!' I retort. 'It is as bleak as blazes, it is drizzly, it is freezing. Furthermore, I have an overwhelming desire, which I cannot gratify, to fly to the moon and flop bathed, slippered, and gowned, into a ponderous couch before a roasting fire, with three big bottles of Clicquot, a box of good cigarettes, and a charming woman, all at my side.'

He is listening, but he is not with me.

'What did you want, mate?'

'Oh, it vas de lessons, den. Yes, yes, yes, yes. De lessons.'



Ah, the lessons! On the afternoon that I give him lessons, I lose sleep. On such occasions it is a sort of unwritten agreement that I make it up by loafing and sleeping through the night watches. For six days I have given him no lessons, because it is too damned cold for me in the officers' mess-room. It is much warmer and more interesting under my blankets with the bugs.

'If you vill like, ve vill take no more lessons till de tropicals, because you are so cold till den,' he suggests. 'But' — in what I fancy is a threatening voice — 'it vill be very colder out on de deck all nights in de vatches——?'

Blackmail! No lessons, no sleep! To be able to sleep during the watches, and get out of those three turns and the rope-hauling, I will sink to considerable depths. I would deliver up my precious little wealth, perjure myself in twenty different forms, and eat a plateful of *lapskois*. But dam' this fellow's eyes. I am here as a passage-worker, slogging out half my guts for the exalted price of one shilling a month, and I'm going to have a spot of loaf without blackmail. To hell with him! Any mucking about, and they'll see my good Australian fighting blood up. I weighed a useful eleven-ten when I came aboard. Probably down to ten now, but it has all gone fairly hard. This fellow'd better be bloody careful with me, or I'll pitch him overboard.



‘All right, mate. I know it will be cold without you telling me. And I shall be glad to cut out the lessons till the tropics. Altogether, if you like.’

He is young, and he is a Finn; therefore he knows no restraint. We have had words before, and have threatened each other. Now he makes a swipe at me, but I don’t wait to receive it. I stand off a few feet.

‘Careful, you bloody Finn,’ I say, through closed teeth.

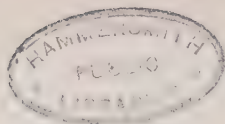
Two more swipes, one of which I am not quite quick enough to dodge. And then, bang goes my own self-control. For ten minutes we enjoy the time-honoured sport of beating each other up, unobserved, in front of the charthouse on the poop. Nobody can hear us in this howling wind. Both bloody, we pause for breath. He glares at me.

‘You are taking de look-out till de end of de vatch,’ he spits at me, white with temper. He goes down to his cabin. Now, I really shall look out. He keeps an automatic in his cabin. Well, he isn’t the only one with an automatic. Before going to the look-out, I go to my bag. Then I remove traces of our dispute, and go to the look-out.

This is foolish. The Old Man will hear about it, and there’ll be the devil to pay. To hell with him, too. He can’t tip me overboard, and he certainly

won't stop his ship to touch port before we get to Europe. Anyway, the skipper is a man, and may not make much of a fuss. If he does hear of it, he shall hear it all. I think he knows just how matters stand with Andrastyrman, for he treats him always with a dreadful, cold contempt.

Hours and hours pass, it seems. Nothing happens. The ship sails along steadily. Every so often somebody comes up and howls 'bells' and I ring them. I am freezing, but what does it matter. Midnight comes. Eight bells. I wait until my relief appears, then go aft, and report 'lights bright: all clear ahead' to the chief mate who is now in charge. I go to the bulwark and empty my surplus to the waves. Back to the *skans*, a hunk of stale dry bread and some cold washy coffee – the steward locks the galley at eight p.m. each night – a cigarette, and to bed. I am a sailor at a shilling a month. I have earned about a *pienna*-piece to-day.



## C H A P T E R   I I

It is amazing how quickly the time passes – after it has passed. When one is standing at the wheel watching the hands of the little charthouse clock creep from zero to zero in their sixty-minute circuit, they seem to have ton-weights attached to them. But when Sunday comes and one looks back over the days to the beginning of the previous week, it seems that that other Sabbath vanished only a moment ago. The explanation is simple. Each individual watch may be long and weary, but it has a deadly monotony that clouds the passage of time. To-day we do this and that and the other. To-night we shall do the same as we did last night. So it will be to-morrow, and to-morrow's morrow, and the next and next and next. No newspapers, nothing exciting happening, nothing calling for any mental alertness – except to avoid getting washed overboard – not even any money to deal in. We haven't seen money nor spoken in terms of money for three and a half weeks. There is little time for reading even, these days. *Rob Roy* is my only salvation. I have missed one instalment, too, and it has upset all my calcula-

tions. Gösta inadvertently applied it to his own foul ends. On watch, day and night, we are kept busy. And in our free watches we want all the sleep we can get. It amounts almost to mental negation and little occurs to single out any one day from another. Always horizon – that is the only spur to the imagination. Thus it is that, weary as it is in passing, the time seems to fly. I have two diversions to hold me from stagnation – the men I am among, and Nature outside the ship.

The most curious thing I have observed in the Swedish and Finnish sailors, who comprise six-sevenths of our mixed men, is that all suffer from a sort of pessimistic melancholia, evident in all weathers and under all circumstances. If the weather is cold, they moan about its getting colder ‘bimebye’; if it turns warmish, they are equally convinced that presently the atmosphere will become unbearably hot; when the wind blows hard, they point to a storm of colossal fury ere the night is done, and ‘bimebye *frivakt* out on deck and all mans must take sail.’ On the other hand, if the water is soothed to a gentle billow and the wind to a zephyr, the possibility of being stranded in the doldrums for weeks on end occurs to them instantly. Their mothers must have told them about the bogey man, for they are always afraid of what will happen ‘bimebye.’ They seem to take no enjoyment whatever from the moment.

This absolute inability to look on the bright side extends from Gösta the youngest apprentice to the captain. The Old Man, however, is apprehensive only when everything is dead wrong. In fair weather he sticks out his chest like a fighting bantam cock and paces the poop with firm rapid strides. But if storm-clouds gather, his shoulders droop dejectedly, his feet become as if glued before the head compass, and he won't budge until all is fair again. His practice is to sleep from ten o'clock at night to six in the morning. If the mates think his presence on deck is needed during that time, they have orders to call him up. Erik says that the skipper is a human barometer. He explained this in the following concise manner:

'De kapten 'self are de barometer. De mate are grading his boonk in metres. So if de mate on vatch are fearing a storm, he are going to de kapten's boonk. If de kapten are lying two metres in boonk de mate are knowing de vet'er are good. But if de kapten are shrinking and are lying only one and halv metre, den de mate are fearing baddest storm and are waking de kapten.'

The average age of our men is twenty-one years – seven youngsters pull the average down to this. But for that matter all but about four are merely youngsters, boys doing the work of tough men. The captain calls us his 'baby' crew.

With the exception of two and a half of the mates, three Finns, and two others, everybody aboard is the son of a gentleman. Ship life has roughened manners and conversation until not one of the sons exhibits the least sign of being a gentleman. There are the merest occasional glimpses of culture and courtesy – to be found mostly in Erik and Bertil.

In almost every ship's f'c'sle the free watch or meal conversation is devoted mainly to discussions on three universal subjects – woman, liquor, and venereal disease. The hard-going sailor who makes wind-jamming his vocation seems to regard himself as a he-man only when his flesh has been caressed by the lips of twenty nations, when he has been at least once venereal, and when he has spent several nights in miscellaneous prisons and been convicted the following morning for disgusting drunkenness.

My babies are not quite as bad as this. Certainly after their four months' journey from Larvik to Melbourne they spent their spare time ashore in drinking and fornicating up and down Little Lonsdale Street, Melbourne's infamous brothel quarter. They still talk and joke about 'Little Lon' but actually they are not vicious with it. They are high-spirited youngsters, and it is an inevitable phase. Most of the boys are in their second or third year of practical



seamanship (necessary for their entry into one or another of Sweden's exacting navigation schools). My two greatest *kameraden*, Bertil and Erik, have travelled widely and well, and have inhabited themselves of a combined heterogeneous knowledge at once remarkable for their years, and absorbing. I have learned and understood from them more about many things in this last month than was ever rammed down my throat during my whole ten years' schooling or picked up in seven years of journalism. They tell me how a gentleman named Leif Erikson discovered America long before Columbus; for the first time in my career I am permanently seized of the fact that Magellan gazed on a vast ocean during a period of doldrums and inadvertently named it Pacific (I shall always remember this because I cannot help wondering what the old boy would think if he saw his Pacific crashing high over our cabins and filling our bunks with water); I learn of the godly and artistic wonders of Cordova; that the border states were created by the League of Nations to keep Soviet Russia within the bounds of *teum et meum*; that the Finns, reputedly such fine fellows, are more dangerous than the Southern Europeans because of their impetuous and trained use of the knife in all exigencies; and I learn of a thousand other things. I have a profound admiration for these



two chaps. They are helpful, too, in delightfully translating into English or French the things that the others have to tell me, and also in the work of the ship.

Without Gösta I should be lost. To save myself from acute poisoning I have trained him to taste everything that comes along disguised as food, and then to give me a truthful and fairly accurate opinion, based on my own standards to a knowledge of which I have diligently educated him. One of our stock meals is 'salted buffalay meat,' as he calls it. There are countless barrels of it aboard, and it varies in smell, taste, texture, and age. Gösta takes a sniff and a bite, and pronounces it either good, old, stink, or those terms in negative form. His most delightful speech on record occurred only last night:

'No stink – no old – no bad – but no bloody good!'

\* \* \*

There are eight men on our watch in addition to Andrastyrman. Nils does the work of the bos'un without getting paid anything extra for it. He is twenty-four, and is signed on as *matros*, the Swedish for A.B. For this he draws a salary of fifty-eight kronar (about £3 5s.). The British A.B. receives £9 a month and, considering the life he leads, does not think himself overpaid. Nils's father is a pilot in Sweden, and Nils's father's father was a pilot in Sweden, and Nils

intends to be a pilot in Sweden. He is a skilful sailor, but hates this life. Romance? Bah!

'If little boys only knew . . . ' he started to tell me a few nights back when we were swishing about at midnight trying to take sails, with waves pounding over like heavy artillery fire. He was interrupted by a wave which knocked him to the other side of the ship. He is so indignant about this that, although I have pressed him, he cannot remember what he was about to tell me. I think it was of the disillusionments of a life on the bounding wave.

The Frog and Zetty the carpenter are the only other A.B.'s of our watch. Zetty is an Åland Islander, with no complete language of his own – like many other Ålanders. Since the break with Russia these Ålanders have developed a queer national complex. They seem now to be torn between allegiance to Finland on the one hand, and to Sweden on the other. Actually they belong to Finland. Both languages are taught to them in the schools, with the result that they are proficient in neither. If they are questioned as to their nationality they might confess it as though wrung from them. But as far as my experience can be the judge, they do not seem anxious or proud to own to it. Such men are Zetty and Andrastyrman. It seems extraordinary to me. Mariehamn is their capital town. I have a

passion for names, and if my address were as attractive as 'Mariehamn' I would let everybody know about it. Gösta is born of Swedish parents, but is a native of Finland himself. Although he is almost perfectly bi-lingual he makes a special point of emphasising that he is Swedish. This boy is the only one, apart from the captain, who can really speak both Swedish and Finnish. He spends half his time translating and interpreting.

Gösta, of course, is on our watch. There is another Finn with us. This is Einar, aged seventeen, height six feet, weight twelve stone, strength colossal, mind negative. He is a son of one of the most celebrated lawyers in Viborg and is a typical example of the boy who goes to sea for the fun of it, with no definite aim or ambition, and no worries. He loves this life, revels in the filth, squalor, roughness, pornography, and especially the freedom of it. He is interested in me and my doings, and sometimes comes and sits on Gösta's sea-chest in our *skans* – sits, with a vacant expression under his beautiful Swedish bear-skin *kremal*, and just unquestioningly watches everything I do. I feel sure that if it were possible for me to conceive a child in my bunk, he would just sit and watch me in the same manner. Einar and I can understand about eight words of each other's conversation. Three of these are unprintably taboo, one is excessively blasphemous,

and the others are Swedish-English – *bra* (goot, very goot), and *inga bra* (no goot); *ja* (yes) and *nez* (no). We sometimes engage in protracted repartee, with Gösta acting as interpreter, but only in terms of filth, blasphemy, and abuse. Gösta refuses to translate other than these. It is a waste of time, he says.

‘*Haista vittu,*’ says Einar to me, with a dirty grin.

Gösta lusciously interprets this as directing me to be unforgivably rude to a lady. We all laugh at this, and I cudgel my brains.

‘*Kyss me röven,*’ I retort . . .

Then there is a pause for awhile, during which Einar and Gösta chatter in Finnish between themselves. They speak rapidly. It sounds like a babble in the ears of the uninitiated. Monkey noises are luculent by comparison.

Einar rolls a cigarette – my paper and my tobacco. He is not a regular smoker, and never buys his own.

‘Have you got a match?’ he asks.

I retort with a phrase that floors him, and before he can think of anything to cap my filth, I go out on deck and turn three somersaults and two backward swings on the taut lifeline.

The others in our watch, making a total of eight, are Marty and Svenny. I rather like them both. Marty is one of the most ill-used and abused men I have ever known. He and Andras-

tyrman are out of friendship, and poor Marty gets much the worst of it. If there is any filthy job going he gets it. He, too, is but a youngster, and it makes a white man's blood boil to see the way he is treated. The boy can't do anything about it as he is staking his all on getting a good discharge from this ship. If he rises up in righteous wrath against his persecutor he will get a bad discharge, and that would be fatal to his cause. So he has to grin and bear it and become embittered against authority. This, by the way, applies to most of the others. It is the only thing that ties their hands. If it were not for this, there would be a grand slaughtering mutiny that would put the exploits of the Bounty boys in the shade. This is no exaggeration. In the hearts of nine-tenths of the men is the smouldering fire of hatred, whence springs murder. Their homicidal tendencies are disguised under a sullen obedience, and all for a slip of paper – their discharge sheet.

Marty came aboard with only one suit of clothes. Andrastyrman is craftily aware of this, and sends the boy everywhere where there is swishing water and he is likely to get wet. To get your clothes wet down here in the land of the ice and the snow is the most distressing and uncomfortable thing I know. It must be a terrific shock to the constitution. Once the clothes are wet, the coldness and salt dampness

keep them wet. Pretty nearly every watch Marty gets wetter than he was before. He looks like a permanent wave. How he tolerates it is far beyond me. In addition to the strength of a young lion, he must have the constitution of an ox and the perseverance and self-control of a dozen strong-minded men.

\* \* \*

The port watch, led by the chief mate and the third, also comprises eight men besides. First among these is Bertil who, when not hauling rope and canvas on deck and aloft, spends his time in the sail workroom among miles of wood-tarred twine, bag needles, and brand new canvas. He is the sailmaker, although he doesn't get paid anything extra for it, being classed simply as *matros*. He is twenty-one and has been sailing for about three or four years. He had already served his time before he came on the *Archibald Russell*, and made the round trip solely to accompany his young brother whose introduction it was to the sailing ship life. It was this young brother, by the way, who was kicked down the coal peak by Andrastyman on the trip from Larvik. The boy was so fed up that he deserted the ship on arrival at Victoria. Bertil was quite philosophical about having made the trip in vain. He had the pleasure of being in the plot that resulted in the beating-up of the mate in Mel-



bourne. Bertil is of fine athletic build, is exceedingly strong, the most skilful all-round sailor aboard, and handsome in a heavy way. He speaks very good and almost fluent English, and when I first came aboard I mistook him for an Australian at first meeting.

Yervy, as half of his long name is pronounced, is another *matros* on the port watch. He is one of the quietest and most interesting men among us. He is a regular beachcomber, and joined the crew in Melbourne through the kindness of the captain. In Sydney he deserted a Norwegian cargo-boat, tramped for two months to Melbourne, and got signed on with us. He celebrated this by borrowing five pounds from the captain to buy himself some clothes. Next morning the skipper was called up by Russell Street police station to bail Yervy out. He had been arrested in Bourke Street for having been drunk and exceedingly disorderly. He is a typical hard-swearing, nought-caring, all-daring sailor. He has very few warm clothes, and these he tends as carefully as an economic housewife. Whenever I see him on free watch he is either washing or darning one garment or another. His suit of oilskins is the patchiest, neatest outfit of any. And regularly each watch he has an argument with either the chief or the third, and generally finishes up by telling them to run away and



commit all sorts of physical impossibilities. I have given Yervy some of my spare clothes, although God knows I haven't half enough to keep me as warm as I want to be. A few less don't really matter.

Erik and Pittson are on the port watch. Erik, although twenty-eight, is classed as an apprentice. This apprentice business is costly for young Scandinavians. They have to pay the owner of the ship about £50 or £60 for the exclusive privilege of being signed on. I wouldn't pay tuppence for it; but it is a great honour for a Scandinavian to make the trip to Australia and back, especially if he wants to rise to the front in the mercantile navies of the world. A good discharge from a wind-jammer is not only desirable, but in Scandinavia and Finland it is necessary if a sailor would rise higher. At the end of this trip all the Swedes and Finns in our crew, aside from the captain and steward and the two youngest apprentices, will enter navigation schools in their respective countries.

Pittson is a *lattmatros*, or ordinary seaman. He is a good enough sailor, and an amiable fellow at times, but more often he is just a clumsy, sullen, bad-tempered wretch. His English is delightful.

'This is your spoon, and this is not mine,' he deftly announces one night when sorting the weapons with which we attack the culinary curios.

Pittson – great big pachydermatous Pittson! The typical sailing Swede. Weighs and eats more than any two others aboard. How he manages to swallow food that stinks from here to hell and go on living is here suggested as the eighth wonder of the world. We complain of the amount he eats, because of the effect it has on the atmosphere.

‘*Og, og, og,*’ he guffaws, and it sounds like ‘oy-oy-oy.’ An evil air at once surrounds us. ‘Oi fawted,’ he explains unnecessarily.

‘And don’t I bloodywell know it, you dirty mucker,’ says a voice at the door, as London enters. ‘Urcher!’

We all light pipes or cigarettes on such occasions.

Pittson in repose is a surly looking devil. He is slightly bow-legged and has the stance of a sparring partner to a rough-neck pugilist. On his face are two scars, parallel to his mouth – one above and the other below. These combine to invest his heavy profile with a disgruntled distension like the fusion of a Roman sneer and the pre-breakfast scowl of a cockatoo. He doesn’t shave. The only growth is on his chin, and this bears a resemblance to a chicken’s breast between plucking and singeing stages. He has biceps like the village blacksmith, and I have seen things not unlike his forearms priced at five shillings apiece in a butcher’s shop window.

The complement of the port watch are Santy and Putte, both fine young Swedes and gentlemen, another Finn, and London.

There is a good story about Putte, told to me by Bertil. Putte is a fresh-faced young man, with the complexion of a very beautiful girl of about seventeen. He is slightly built but with great strength and a punch like the left hind kick of a mule. One night when several of them were wandering about Melbourne, an indiscreet homosexualist mistook the good-looking Putte for one of his depraved kind and made advances. Putte left the strangled remains for the first ambulance that came along on its way to the mortuary.

The Frog likes none of the men, and the men like none of him. I had my first lesson aloft from the Frog. We have to go up and overhaul the main top-gallant.

‘How do you get on with the fellows here?’ I ask him.

‘Dam’ bloody!’ he spits, and shows me his hands. They are torn and, in fact, bloody through clutching a piece of rotten wire rope.

‘Rotten, rotten – everyt’ing on zis bloody ship rotten. See zis string he give us to tie rope? He iss rotten, oosh!’ – it breaks easily with a jerk – ‘See ’im b’low? *Pauvre bâtard! Malheureux cochon!* He know not’ing. Nobody know not’ing.’

‘That’s rather hard on them, isn’t it?’

'*C'est vrai, n'est-ce pas?* Mos' on board go to navigaci-ci-ci-ci . . .'

'Navigation?'

' . . . navigacio' school. Not'ing more. Don't learn not'ing. Not clevailr like me. I learn wit'-out school. But zese men? Jus' like ze 'orse in circus. Zey learn to go roun' an' roun' an' roun' - after zen - not'ing.'

He points down to Andrastyrman who is standing on the bridge over the maindeck.

'See 'im? Don't know not'ing, by Chris'.'

'Perhaps he doesn't care,' I suggest. 'He tells me this is his last trip in a wind-jammer, and that he is going for a master's ticket and a steamer after this. Maybe it's just that he doesn't care.'

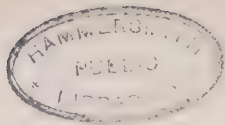
'Don' matter if he care or not. He dunno jus' t' same.'

There is a pause while we gadget another bunt-line.

'All men 'ere say you don' know not'ing, either,' says the Frog, interested in the effect this information has on me.

'Well, they can all go to blazes for any difference it makes to me. I don't know anything, for that matter.'

'Don' worry,' he says. 'Zey ain't men. Zey only savages. Strong, yes. Big bodies, an' big 'eads, but not'ing in 'em.'



## C H A P T E R   I I I

JACK LONDON has made a great friend of Nils. He has little to do with the others except Bertil and Erik, for the simple reason that he cannot understand Swedish or Finnish, and doesn't bother to try. I tell him this is a great mistake, as the Scandinavians will be his only contact with civilisation for several months to come, and he might as well be matey as lonely. He says he doesn't care, and to hell with the crew. He had as lief be lonely.

It is nearly midnight and our next watch. I am on first *utkik* after eight bells. My free watch I have spent over illicit coffee in the next *skans*, chatting with Bertil and Erik. At eleven o'clock they went out on duty, and I came up here to the f'c'sle with London. Since I am still out of bed, I might as well hang around until the fateful hour of midnight.

'What's the speed now?' is London's first question.

'Ten knots,' I tell him.

'Blimey,' says he. 'I thought we were doin' at least fourteen from the way she's been knockin' up the water.'

'Give the poor old slimy bitch a chance. She

can only do twelve to thirteen when she's loaded like this, and fourteen at the most in ballast. The Old Man says if we had a sharp nose like the clippers had we'd be doing at least eighteen now.'

'How much cargo is there?'

'Three-thousand-eight-hundred and thirty-four and a half tons of best Victorian wheat, delivered in trucks-growers' lots, to give you the full title. That's what the Old Man said when I asked him. But it isn't much, is it, when one thinks of what a steamer can carry, and in a third of the time it is taking us.'

'Oh, I suppose every little helps, as the old girl said when she poisoned the sea,' he says, with a cackle at his own remark.

'Blessed if I can see why they still run these bloody old barges for trade. The owner makes thirty-two bob a ton out of our cargo. That's only six thousand quid. It must cost him a fair wallop of that for port and harbour dues – two or three months in Melbourne for unloading wood pulp, buying grain, and loading again – tugs, pilots, running expenses for the ship, crew's wages, and food. It all mounts up, you know.'

'I'll bet it don't cost much for the last two,' he says bitterly. 'Here I'm workin' my guts out on an average of twelve workin' hours a day, and what do I get out of it? One measly bloody shillin' a month. And as for the grub – it don't



cost much for a couple o' ton o' road sweepin's.'

'So you think the food's like that, too?' I laugh.

'No, I'm sure of it. I've had a nasty taste in my mouth and a nasty smell under my nose ever since I started to eat it nearly a month ago. Hell, I even have to run away from my own fart.'

He turns disgustedly away, walks the short width of the f'c'sle twice to see that the lights are bright, and returns to lean against the back railing. Footsteps clump along the foredeck.

'*Ett glass!*' yells a voice. It sounds like Yervy's.

In the old days of ships, before some clever gentleman gave us clocks and watches, a half-hour time-glass used to be placed in the wheelhouse over the helmsman's head. He kept a corner of his eye on it and every time it ran out, he struck one bell. This was known as one glass. The term is still in use on the Scandinavian ships. *Ett* in Swedish means 'one.' The system is for the helmsman to strike one bell, the policeman on deck goes for'ard and shouts '*ett glass*' or whatever the case may be – *ett, tva, tre, fyra, fem, sex, sju, oder* – and the man on look-out strikes the same number on the f'c'sle bell. One bell is the signal for the new watch to rise up and prepare to take over. In the case of day watches, the warning is given forty minutes before the changing of the watch, to allow for the poulticing of stomachs. At nights, when there are no meals, the warning



is fifteen minutes before the change. Pity help the man who is late. He will suffer in some way, because the retiring watch is always anxious to get to bed.

'*Ett glass,*' yammers the voice again through the darkness.

London peers down. It is the first time he has heard this in Swedish.

'Oo did?' he demands.

There is a pause.

'*Ett glass! Ett glass!*'

'Oo did, you silly barstard?'

Another pause. It would be criminal to spoil the fun.

'*ETT Glass!*'

'Orl right, mudguts, you said that before. Ate glass, ATE GLASS! Well, just you go back an' tell 'im, 'ooever 'e is, that it serves 'im bloodywell right. You greedy swine are all the same. Blimey! Ain't you satisfied to git poisoned with the food the stooard gives you, an' die quiet, without chewin' the lamps? 'Ungry-gutted lotter barstards! Urcher!'

\* \* \*

The watch has changed. I am now on the f'c'sle, alone, keeping look-out. It is wretchedly cold, with an occasional shower of hail, and a biting wind. The foresail swells its paunch with vulgar plops above my head. Waves crash over

the side, even high up as this, and each time one comes across, I have to turn my back and crouch my head deep into my shoulders to prevent the water from getting down my neck and running right down into my seaboots. A trickle of this icy water down a man's stomach almost drives him insane. I know, because I have experienced it. I am now getting wise to many of the tricks of trade. My clothing at present consists of three wet pairs of socks, two suits of underclothing, two pairs of trousers (one wet), a thick working shirt, a tight-fitting pullover, a thick high-collared Astrakkan waist-length jacket (I stole this from my brother's wardrobe at home in Adelaide: I think it belonged to one of his girl friends), and a long woolly scarf. Over all this I have heavily-oiled trousers, jacket, and sou'-wester, and rubber sea-boots which reach up to my knees. Still I am cold. This is a clumsy outfit. It gets in the way when you have to climb up the crazy rigging to the royals, and makes you sweat like a pig – although cold – when hauling ropes or struggling with the wheel. There are no pockets in the oilskin trousers or jackets. They would get torn in the rig, and moreover, would not be watertight. Also, the use of gloves in the rig is disallowed: it handicaps the worker and lessens the speed of the work. Altogether it is extremely uncomfortable.

Up and down the f'c'sle deck to try and keep warm. Up and down – to and fro – a short ten paces from side to side to see that the lamps are bright and to watch for possible danger ahead or on either side. Up and down – to and fro – the deck is deep-worn here. How many hundreds of poor cold wretches have walked it before me? I feel like the Prisoner of Chillon. Up and down – to and fro – with nothing but the elements for companionship, a glowing pipe-bowl, thoughts, and a horizon that cannot now be seen. What is ahead there? What around? And what behind? We are singularly isolated. This little ship, our island, our world – one hundred yards long and twelve yards wide and one-hundred-and-eighty feet high from deck to tip of topmast. We are entirely cut off – a little band of twentieth century ascetics. Our isolation is the more complete since we have no wireless in our ship. We know nothing of the outside world; the outside world knows nothing of us – from the time we leave Melbourne until we meet the North Atlantic shipping, or arrive in person at Queenstown or Falmouth.

Up and down – to and fro – midnight f'c'sle reflections! Where do they fly? Invariably homewards . . . ?

\* \* \*

Ten o'clock is striking from the old church tower of Saint Andrew as Gran lights the Moon

Lamp and gives the electric switch cord a disdainful little tug. The effect of these manœuvres is like the waving of a fairy wand. Commonplace things about the room assume fantastic shapes under the soft, quaint glow.

Gran's thoughts dance elfinly in gleeful sympathy. She loves this old Moon Lamp, which has ushered a gentle sleep into her soul all the nights of her life for over seventy years. She couldn't imagine those nights without it. The little Moon Lamp is so definitely a part of her fragile scheme of things. She feels now that if the lamp were to fail, like other lamps she has seen which just go 'plop!' she would just go 'plop!' out of sheer sympathy.

To all those of her closer circle, this dear old figure is just 'Gran' although in actual blood relationship the title can be claimed by a bare half-dozen. Her mother, she reflects, would have taken several fits at such familiarity, but then there never was anybody with a more inexhaustible supply of fits to suit all occasions than her mother. And Gran still is very young in heart, and loves with an illuminating love that jolly little circle wherein she is Gran.

There have been sad, harsh episodes, but these seem merely to have increased her faith in the whole universe, her understanding, sympathy, and mellow illogical wisdom, which are mostly Gran and for which she is adored. . . .

How vivid the goldfish look in their round bowl near the window! One, larger than the rest, flashes out above his companions and, as though aware he is being admired, slowly and deliberately swishes his long double tail. What smug complacency! Gran wonders if she has ever been a goldfish. Old Atreb the Pious – Atreb who, like so many of this world's praying parrots, keeps her eyes on heaven and her heart in hell, gives a shilling a week to the 'poor heathens' who are being sinfully interfered with, that they shall turn from their gods of sin to our god of salvation, and in consequence of her help towards the interference is known as a god-fearing and righteous woman – Atreb is always saying people have so many stages of existence, popping up here as a polar bear, there as a daffodil, and next as a mosquito. What fun to be a mosquito next time! Such a lot of people in the world who are simply asking to be stung – if one can believe what one hears and reads. If her soul could be trans-migrated in the next change to that of a mosquito she would like to come back and sting Old Atreb just for fun – sting her once and then buzz around her head for the rest of the night. Perhaps too, if there are a few more times to go after that, she might pray hard and become a goldfish some day. Well, if she were, she would like to have a long double tail like that big

dreamy self-assured fellow there. He seems to flick the tail in acknowledgment of the flattery.

‘Nice fish,’ thinks Gran. ‘Nice and friendly.’

Ooh-h-h-h! It has been one of her golden days, but now she is so tired, so tir-e-d. Ooh-h-h-h!

From the paper all around the walls of her elegant room, mysterious blue-and-gold birds, preening and fluttering in the dim yellow comforting light, watch over her. Down by the old church the curlews whistle, long drawn-out, eerily. Gran loves them, too. Through lace-curtained windows she sees the infinite garden of heaven twinkle a friendly good-night.

This is early autumn in Rosebery, South Australia. From outside under Gran’s window comes the fragrant breath of lavender and myrrh, and a dozen other lovely scents, all mingling in one glorious living pot-pourri.

‘They are all . . . so beautiful . . . and friendly,’ she murmurs, drowsily.

As two deliciously tired old eyelids flutter into slumber, the Moon Lamp shudders ever so lightly. Gran sleeps. . . .

\* \* \*

Midnight f’c’sle reflections! . . . I have completely forgotten the ship, and the fact that upon me during this hour depends its safety if any islands or icebergs are about. It is my besetting sin. In moments of self-analysis I find that I



dream much too much, as a former schoolmaster once told me. My arms are now folded across the top of the windlass, and my head rests on them. I am lost to time and place. Suddenly something forces me to look up and around with a start. Good God! Am I in hell? for there, without a doubt is the face of the Devil! No, my mistake. It is Andrastyrman who stood thus behind, and now stands before me, with a dirty, leering look on his bearded face.

‘Vos dis how you keep de look-out?’ he enquires.

I am silent, with the silence of assent. There is nothing else.

‘Vad happens to de shep an’ de cargo an’ de men if anyt’ing should come in de way?’ he wants to know.

‘According to my map,’ I answer evenly, ‘there is no land within hundreds of miles, and we are travelling only ten knots. We are several degrees above the northern limit of drift ice. And if a whale or anything like that gets in the way of our bows it’ll be his own damned fault, not mine.’

‘Do you t’ink dat’s funny?’ he asks, sarcastically.

‘Yes -- and no.’

‘Vad you mean, telling me “yes” and “no”?’  
Vad you mean?’

‘Both.’

He glares wildly for a moment.

‘Vell, den, de kapten von’t!’



‘Von’t vot?’ I enquire, ingenuously.

Blue murder? For a moment it seems like it. No, he stalks off in high dudgeon. I am quite willing to have another ten minutes’ bout with him – it would make me warm.

I have a free mind about it. Nothing more has been heard of our brawl of the poop deck a few nights back. A mate is forbidden to strike a seaman and vice versa. Either Andrastyрман has his reason for not reporting me to the captain, or else the Old Man won’t listen to him. Whatever it is, I seem to have come out with a slight advantage. I have been cheeking Andrastyрман for three days, and will up and at him if anything comes of it.

Svenny clumps along.

‘*Tva* glass!’

Thank goodness. Another look-out turn over. Bramsson relieves me. I am now policeman for an hour.

Police duty embraces nothing much beyond hanging around on deck and getting cold, occasionally turning the ventilators dead against the wind, a few inches this way, a few inches that, sometimes pulling ropes that won’t go any tighter, scrambling up the rigging for a small job of work, lighting the compass-lamps if they go out, and dodging the waves as they pound across the deck. Being at loggerheads with the

mate, I do all these things, at regular intervals of a few minutes between each. As soon as I finish everything there is to be done I start at the beginning of the round and do them all over again. As long as I patrol my beat, up and down the quarterdeck where the mate can see or at least hear me, I am safe. But the minute I disappear from his ken, there is a frantic shrilling of his whistle. He always has an excuse for blowing that whistle, even if only to shift a coil of rope from one peg to another. There is perhaps no greater barrier between a man and his peace of mind than a ship's mate with a grudge. I feel like a dog at times. No sooner do I creep into my own *skans* for a drink of water or a cigarette, or into the *stor skans* for a chat with Nils, than I am whistled out of it.

Somehow the end comes. I thump to the f'c'sle, shout bells, and clump back to the wheelhouse, where I stand behind the helmsman. His position is on the windward side of the wheel. That is, if the wind is blowing across the starboard or right-hand side of the ship, the helmsman stands that side.

The retiring helmsman manœuvres the ship until the point of the compass exactly indicates the course by which we sail. He steps aside, and I quickly take his place. He gives me the course.

'*Ost sud-ost halv ost,*' he growls.

*'Ost sud-ost halv ost,'* I growl back.

He clumps off and flings it at the mate.

*'Ost sud-ost halv ost.'*

*'Ost sud-ost halv ost,'* affirms Andrastyrman.

I then settle down to wrestle a course of east south-east half east. I am only just now getting used to steering. The wheel itself stands about three-feet-six in diameter. It is extremely difficult to turn in a big running sea, and if the waves are smashing right across the ship the wheel is difficult even to hold still. This is because of the force with which the waves smack against the rudder. Young Gösta was steering one dirty night, and the wheel got beyond him and carried him right over the top in a semi-circle and dumped him on the other side of the wheel-house.

Oh Hell! That wheel! *'De vyle,'* the Swedes call it, and it certainly is the vilest thing I have ever laid hands upon – the vilest and most cantankerous. If I want to turn it to port it presses firm to starboard, and when to starboard I endeavour to coax it, the thing is seized with an unholy desire to jig violently to starboard. If I compromise by trying to turn it a little this way and then a little that, not a budge! It stands firm. But on such occasions as I would have it remain still for a few seconds, it crashes madly to and fro over the two or three inches of backlash. No

wonder the poor wretched sailor becomes superstitious and firmly believes in the malevolence of inanimate objects.

The mate comes over and peers at the compass. I would give my soul to have it straight on the course. It is not there. It is a quarter-point out.

‘Vere are ve going?’ he demands.

‘Ask of the winds that all around——’

‘Over dis vay,’ he commands. Of course I must obey. I struggle wildly until I am gasping for breath. He makes me take the rudder right over, necessitating about twenty revolutions of the wheel. The correction is too much. Off goes the ship a quarter-point the other side of the course. The mate makes me revolve the wheel twenty revolutions back to starting-point, and then another twenty to the other side for re-correction. This continues for fifteen minutes – backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, until I will have it no longer.

‘You are off de course still,’ he says.

I stand down from the wheel – the sin of sins – glaring murderously at him.

‘Will you shut up, or will you take the bloody wheel yourself?’

‘Get back to de vyle,’ he says. But he shuts up and presently walks off to pace the poop again. Einar taught me this move.

Never shall I forget my first experience at that

wheel. It was during the long watch on the second night out from Williamstown. We started out on a Monday and were towed down Port Phillip Bay by a pilot. At two o'clock next morning he cast us off to the whim of the winds and waves of Tasman Sea. This famous little stretch of water is one of the roughest bits on the globe. It is seldom calm, and when in its rougher moods is like the English Channel at its worst. It was not calm when we entered it. All that day the world rocked and heaved about me. I could eat no food. But I had to keep working. I did not then know as much as I know now. As long as the sailor on the Finnish wind-jammer remains up on deck, his job is to work. If he drops, that is all right. He is then entered in the log-book as *sjuk* (means 'sick' and is pronounced 'shook'). At the time I didn't drop. I scorned dropping. I went on watch. That night I was sent to the wheel, and had my first lesson under the eight-worded tuition of Einar, the healthy young Finn from Viborg. I was there five minutes when suddenly my stomach could stand it no longer. I went to the poop railing. The mate and Einar exchanged a beastly chuckle. Curse them! Determined, but rather wobbly, I went back to the wheel, and stayed another three minutes. Back again to the side. Back to the wheel – to the side – to the wheel. I stuck it

somehow to the end of the watch, and collapsed in a gurgling green heap on my bunk. I couldn't stir a finger for sixteen hours, and I couldn't eat for three days. Since then I have had no sign of further trouble.

My wheel-hour comes to an end. Bramsson relieves me. He is very brusque about it. He swaggers up and before he is in position, he bawls:

'Leggo!'

I ignore him until he is in his place.

'Leggo!'

I do as bidden with a rush. He is unable to step up in time to grasp the spokes before they emulate a catherine-wheel. It will take him some time to struggle back to course with that.

'Satisfied?' I ask. 'Next time, don't bother to be so pleasant about it. You needn't ask me for it. You can have the damned thing with pleasure. Take it permanently, it's yours.'

'Are you giving him de course?' asks the mate, who is interestedly watching us.

'Yes, he can have that thrown in,' I snap, my blood well up. '*Ost sud-ost halv-ost.*'

'*Ost sud-ost halv-ost.*'

'*Ost sud-ost halv-ost,*' I say to Andrastyrman.

'*Ost sud-ost halv-ost,*' he returns.

Back in the *skans* I find Gösta bending over a weird arrangement on the table. There is a good smell of cooking about.



'Pannicakes,' he grins. 'You have?'

'Delighted laddie. Where'd you get all this?'

'*Kabyss*, v'en dat peeg stooard aren't looking.'

'Good for you, then.'

Little devil! He has stolen a huge tin of flour, some lard, and some precious jam. Jam is a luxury aboard, reserved almost exclusively for the officers, who also have sauce, butter, cruet, biscuits, and pickles – things unknown to us since Melbourne. Gösta has the hurricane lamp on the table. Over the smoking glass is a tin plate suspended from the roof by string. On the plate a goodly pancake is sizzling. He gives it to me, and cooks himself another. We take it in turns of cooking until our bellies are swollen with the doughy mess.

'Cape Horn in two or t'ree days from dis,' says Gösta.

'Who says so.'

'Kapten tell Nils.'

'Hooray for that.'

'Vad de hell is hooray?'

'Oh-er, just "cheers." In other words, Jes' Chris', I tell him. He makes a note of this. Terribly keen, this kid.

The watch runs out without further incident. We crawl into our bunks with the smile of peace on our faces. Feed the brute . . .!





## C H A P T E R   I V

TUCKING the thirtieth instalment of *Rob Roy* under my arm, I make for the f'c'sle for my daily half-hour. Breakfast, such as it was, is over and we have a well-earned rest until one o'clock. We were on from four o'clock this morning, and a foul time we had of it. The whole watch got soaked to the skin through getting mixed up with hundreds of tons of freezing water which paid us a visit. Cape Horn is just ahead, and well we know it. We had to stand by all the watch, and just before breakfast the port watch was told to stand by, also. They had to debunk themselves half-an-hour earlier and come out and help us set the main lower and upper top-gallants which we had taken in during a furious gust two hours previously. Setting a sail like the main lower to'gn'-sail is no fun for one watch. It has to be hoisted by means of the capstan, and calls for about ten to fifteen minutes of mighty heaving and struggling. But when eighteen strong arms are on the job it is great fun. We just grab the thick halyard, string out in line along the deck, and when all is ready for hoisting the sail, the mate shouts 'tramp pa dack!' whereat we put our guts against it. The leader takes the end over his

shoulder and sinks his weight ahead, while the rest of us follow him, stamping in step along the deck and singing in time, *à la* Volga Boatmen, as we tramp. The Scandinavians revel in strength, and each man tries to out-pull the next one. It is good old tough slogging, but infinitely more exciting than having a steam winch aboard. Our watch runs out while we are still at it, so as soon as the job is done we rush with our dishes to the galley. A plate of porridge awaits us. It fills us like balloons for the time being, but is not very sustaining for eight healthy, hungry, hard-worked bodies. The Frog appositely styles it 'chicken food.'

Gösta is annoyed. When we went to our *skans* this morning the floor was wet again. A week or so ago, after a big storm during which we were out working all the watch, we returned to find our door open and the waves pouring in. Our belongings were floating about in two feet of salt water. We spent all our free watch drying the deck of the cabin after bailing out the water with pails. Since then we have been trying hard to keep it dry. There are great odds against us. Our water tank is filled each morning – one pailful. The clumsy ass who fills it generally manages to spill half the water all over the floor. This has happened five times, and each time Gösta has diligently got brooms and bags and dried it.

But now it has happened again for the sixth successive morning. He has reason to be annoyed.

'*Kyss me röven!*' he cries, and jumps up and down with anger. He produces the brooms and bags again.

'Now I take it bloody vater up vunce times more again. Dis are last time I take it up. If he put it here more, he take it up 'self. *Satan och Satan och Satan!*'

He looks up at me with Puckish indignation, leaning on the broom-handle.

'He don't no put it here on deck. He put it dere in tank.'

'Of course he must, and we'll talk to him about it, *dig och mig,*' I agree, tearing out my four pages of the classic.

\* \* \*

I am in the act of adjusting my numerous garments – jauntily, for the men of the other watch are nearby, dispensing unwilling and disconsolate effort on soda-washing the white-painted sides – when there is heard a noise as of a tormented cat crying out in sharp protest. It seems to come from the poky forecabin occupied by Zetty. It is quite possible, and probable, that the cat has mistaken Zetty's bunk for a lavatory, but there's no need for him to separate the poor wretch from its gut as a punishment.

Zetty is the ideal ship's carpenter. He is the

biggest and most powerful man aboard, and can almost lift the anchor with his naked hands. He stands six-feet-three, with about three feet across at the shoulders. His strength seems to ooze out at one, and at quite normal times his breathing can be heard a dozen paces beyond. He has a large and leery face. From out among the pimples sprouts a sparse but fiery red beard. Smiling, he is about as pretty as Caliban, and in repose much worse. His long red rubber seaboots are turned down below the knees like those of a buccaneer. I have taught him how to express himself adequately in English when he hammers his thumb by mistake, and he can speak a little besides.

Cautiously I open his door to investigate the wailing noises, and lo! it is no dismembered cat, but Zetty lying in his bunk squirming and grunting over a distracted fiddle. As soon as he sees me he says 'uh!' and reaches out and thrusts the thing and its scraping-rod under my nose.

'You play,' he bellows.

'*Kyss me*, I can't Take that thing away. I don't like it.'

'*Vad?*'

'Take it away. *Nez, nez*. No play. Me no play.'

He looks at me intently.

'You!' he roars.

'What?'

'Can oon'stan' me v'en speak I *Engelska*?' he asks, with a smirk like that of Abou Ben Adhem questioning the Angel of the Lord.

'Yes,' I encourage.

He indicates the fiddle.

'*Vad* call you dat?'

'A bloody squawk.'

'*Vad*?'

'Fiddle, 'cello, big bass drum.'

'*Vad*?'

'Violin.'

'Uh!'

There is a pause. He looks around the cabin, and finally points to a text-cloth, beautifully embroidered. The text, evidently hand-worked, is in Swedish:

*'Må ej din hand  
Så hardna uti striden,  
Att den till bön ej knäpps,  
Då dag är liden.'*

Roughly translated, it expresses the hope that 'the hands be not too hard-worked to prevent you from clasping them in prayer when day is done.'

'Like you?' asks Zetty, breathing like a bellows.

'It is very beautiful,' I tell him, with the aid of a Swedish dictionary.

'My mudder make. Give me before me sail dis trip.'

'That is very thoughtful of your mother.'

'You mudder make for you?'

'No, I'm afraid she didn't.

'Uh!'

Another pause.

'Schleep are good.'

'Yes.'

'I go schleep *nu*.'

'Oh well, *schlafen-ze woll*.'

'*Vad*?'

'Bottoms to you. Good-night.'

'God-night.'

\* \* \*

A clatter of dishes awakens me from a deep dream of peace. Erik is 'disk-vashing' as he calls it.

'Hullo, Erik. *Vad ar clockan?*'

'Fo' bells.'

'Goddam you and your blasted dishes. I've got two hours' sleep yet.'

'*Nez*, I'm sorry,' he is very apologetic. Always courteous, when he and I are speaking together. He is twenty-eight, and a born roamer. He spent some time at Heidelberg.

'That's all right, old man. What's the speed?'

'Twelve knots.'

'Very rough?'

'Yes. But soon very rougher bimebye. De kapten are saying we are standing by Cape Horn two mornings after dis.'



‘That’s cheerful, I *don’t* think. Cold and wet and miserable outside as usual, I suppose?’

‘*Nez*, the sun are above, also casting his warm glow over de vorld and all men,’ he replies, unconsciously poetical. It is his manner of English, very quaint and sometimes very beautiful.

‘Port watch still scraping teak?’

‘*Nez*, dey are tighting de lifeline.’

The lifelines are very important on a sailing ship when going over a rough stretch like Cape Horn. Strong men are frequently caught in them and are thus saved from being washed overboard by the force of the water which crashes across. The main lifeline is a stout wire rope, stretched taut along each side from the quarter-deck almost to the foredeck. It is about five feet above the deck, the idea being that when a big wave comes over, you spring for the lifeline and cling grimly to it. It generally means that you get very wet, but at any rate it is safe. If one is pulling braces or other ropes, the safest plan is to cling to them. No matter if you are swished and bumped all over the deck – or even overboard – if you cling like hell to the rope you still have a grip on life. In addition to the wire lifelines running along the deck, port and starboard, safety ropes are placed along the sides above the bulwarks to a height of four feet. Many a time

have I seen men caught in these ropes as though in a sieve. By now the ropes have become slack, and it is reassuring to hear that they are being tightened. We shall probably need them more than ever soon, for the run below Cape Horn and up to the Falkland Islands is known to be treacherous. It was here that two brave men were washed from the jib-boom of this barque on her previous homeward voyage to Europe twelve months ago. Oh, horrible of horrible fates, to find oneself left behind and no hope of being saved. Just to feel the strength ebbing from one, the cold water numbing those limbs that so recently were strong and supple as steel, to feel the soul gradually wrenching itself up from the water, sloughing the dross of the useless body, and then, with a despairing gurgle, to gaze your dizzy last on the engulfing world and sink and die like a rat.

I get up to have a look at the sun. I need a good sight of the sun, for I suppose I shan't have another for some time. It is even now more than a week since I saw it last. It is useless to complain of the dullness, the wet and the cold. The captain merely snorts at me and calls me a 'Blue Nose.' I think he is a trifle mixed about the Blue Noses.

Erik is right. The sun is out in all his matutinal glory. He imbues with such high spirit that I decide to have a wash. Like all the other sanitary

arrangements aboard, the facilities for washing are precarious. The Scandinavians are extraordinarily thoughtless fellows in some ways. They will tell me anything about the ship I ask to know, but they never think of proffering unsought information. I had been aboard a week, and hadn't seen anybody washing. Everybody was so dirty that I decided to get dirty, too. In fact, I thought that to wash oneself was one of those things simply not done. As nobody appeared to wash I didn't know how to go about it without giving offence. Good God! What an unsailorlike prawn I was in those seemingly far-off days. It was a week before I discovered that there *was* a wash-house up for'ard, and that the men *did* wash occasionally. The wash-house was packed with lumber when I discovered it, and anyway it was too cold to wash, so I just left it at that.

But to-day I feel like getting spruced. We are allowed to heat water in the galley. The washing water, fresh water, is kept in two small tanks on the quarterdeck. We are always filling and refilling them to the brim. The boys say we shall need it in the tropics, especially if we get doldrums. The mates have a washroom to themselves, but it is so full of pails and miscellaneous junk that I haven't been able to get near enough inside to investigate it. I sometimes see the steward washing the captain's underpants in one of the

buckets used to carry our drinking water from the pump to our tanks.

After a wash in carbolic soap and a shave and a good tooth scrubbing, I smell like a disinfected drain, but at least have got rid of some of the rubbish. I have not had this underclothing off for nearly two weeks. The singlet is black with dirt and stinks, but it is long and thick and the animal life in it keeps the cold numbness from my body. I give my clothes a good airing for half an hour and then put them on again. Now I can sleep in disinfected comfort for an hour.

\* \* \*

We are back at work again, but thank goodness! there is a change from the everlasting scraping of teak, and soda-washing of white paint. It is too rough and too wet for us to work out on deck. We are all up under the f'c'sle doing old jobs. We are travelling at eight buffeted knots, with the wind roaring into the broad deep foresail, the three sets of lower and upper topsails, and the main, mizzen, and jigger topmast staysails. All the rest are fast to the yards. It is going to be a foul passage below the Cape, it seems. Why on earth we can't rest and conserve our energy for the struggle to come is beyond my comprehension. Training and discipline are all right in their place but they seem oddly out of place just now. The sailor mustn't pause for a well-earned rest. He

must shove his weight into it while the going is good, and mess about with footling jobs – such as that on which we are now engaged – when the going isn't so good. Anything to keep us occupied.

We are plaiting rope. I am beginning to kick myself that I forgot to bring my knucklebones along with me. Plaiting rope! Sounds tommyrot, of course, but really it is a back-breaking task, as we have to bend over it for hours. We are making what is known as bagwrinkle or Spanish wrinkle. This is used on some of the stay-ropes to prevent friction and wear of the sails. The idea is to stretch two lengths of rope between two supports and work backwards, knotting short pieces of strand around the two lengths of rope by means of an easy trick knot – two flicks of the wrist, a poke, a pull, and presto! bagwrinkle. The first foot of this stuff is fascinating. After a yard of it one is proficient; two yards, bored; three yards, loathing the job; four yards and onwards, resigned to it as to all other things aboard.

We are all doing this with the exception of Nils, who is squatting on his behind languidly putting new rope handles on buckets. Nils spends half his life on his behind. Gösta is singing in a horrid cracked voice about an octave too low for him. I recognise the air – a pretty Swedish sea-shanty. But Gösta sings only two bars of it and

then starts again, *solo rondo repetitio* fashion. He keeps this up monotonously until those two bars crash on my ears like the sound of an all-night tom-tom. It gets beyond me.

‘Gösta,’ I plead. ‘For God’s sake go right through it.’

‘*Vad* you say?’

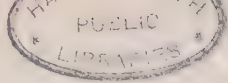
‘Do you know the rest of that song?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, why in hell don’t you sing it all?’

“*Nez*, I like dis part de best,’ he returns, naïvely.





## C H A P T E R     V

### CAPE Horn in a rage!

Treacherous, tempestuous, awful place – cold, deserted, and utterly miserable, with sudden fierce onslaughts of hail the size of marbles, with wind whining and moaning and shrieking like choruses of demented devils, with the blackened, thunder-clouded mien of Heaven scowling down in angry menace upon it.

This is the region of Cape Horn as I see it. It is the region of wind, storm, and rain – perpetual gales and eternal rain – never twenty-four hours without rain. ‘It is the Court of Æolus!’ Mariners are warned that thick, rainy weather and strong winds prevail. The sun shows himself but little; the sky, even in fine weather, is overcast and cloudy. A clear day is a very rare occurrence . . . gales of wind succeed each other at short intervals, and last several days.

The very nomenclature of the place damns it. Tierra del Fuego comes to a point with a group of islands – gaunt rocks, they actually are – named The Hermite, or Cape Horn Isles. Cape Horn is the lowest of these, standing approximately  $56^{\circ}$  S., and jutting out of the water at a certain angle just like a bull’s horn.

Situated north of Cape Horn are the following: False Cape Horn, Desolate Bay, Deceit Island, Cape Deceit, Mistaken Cape, East Furies and West Furies (rocks), Fury Harbour, Fury Peak, The Milky Way, Dislocation Harbour, Goree Road, Hatley Bay. Odd little assortment! The only spot that holds out any promise at all is Hope Harbour, and that is tucked away where it can't be seen.

I have drafted out a list of names the explorers have forgotten. Any expedition going down that way can have my suggestions, together with my sympathies. There is no charge. Something good and dismal, such as: Corpse Rock, Undertaker's Island, Coffin Bay, Funeral Sound, Shroud Inlet, Burial Pass, Cape Cemetery, and Ghost Peak.

One caustic gentleman has noted: 'making the passage around the Horn is so short . . . that it hardly requires a choice of time.' I can picture the writer, crawling gingerly aloft in an 80 m.p.h. gale, the ship listing twenty-five degrees each side, with a murderous-looking mate on deck, foghorning the following:

'*Satan, förbannat, Djevil, fe Fan, kyss me! Hal away, hal away . . . klämm i! . . . Jig tog störssegel . . . Loose dat goddam gording . . . slack away . . . hal, dere! . . . Satan-och-Satan-och-Satan! . . . slack away, vill ja? . . . mak' fas' . . . opp, an' mak' fas' . . . Nu rojeln . . . !*'

And the writer clammers up with a luckless companion to make fast the royal, one-hundred-and-eighty feet aloft, while another grunting group below almost bursts its muscles and lungs to make fast the big *stor-segel*, or mainsail. And two other poor wretches get washed overboard.

Cape Horn in a rage!

\* \* \*

It is by far the worst weather of the trip. Changing all the time. One hour we are tearing along with a whistling westerly on our tail, and nearly all the sails set; the next minute we come in the grip of a wind-and-hail storm and have to fasten the sails back to their yards. We are crashing along through mountainous waves, lurching forward, sometimes almost broadside. All day the talk is of Cape Horn, and the fast passage we are making. We are 57° S. and expect to run directly below the Cape about four o'clock to-morrow morning. We are thirty sailing days from Williamstown and have beaten the record for Finnish ships by two days – a performance that reflects great credit on the fine seamanship of our skipper.

In the forenoon our watch scrapes teak in between handling the sails. The port watch does likewise in the afternoon. We unfortunately have the long night watch. When the policeman comes to rouse us at half-past-six the wind has reached

terrific velocity. Still most of the sails stand. Waves are crashing across the entire deck, and our crazy *skans* trembles beneath every avalanche that hits it. The policeman staggers in with a dish of mixed *lapskois* and salt water. The meal we eat is meagrely poor. Unhealthy as it is we gobble the lot. We drag on our oilskins and seaboots, and sit moodily waiting. At last six bells clang out in a sort of scream above the sounds of the elements.

\* \* \*

*‘Los av ror och utkik. Vell frivakt! Vakten skall vara på dack!’*

Flung gutturally down from the poop by the chief mate the Swedish order comes to rest in the ears of the fourteen young sailors who, shivering, group themselves according to their assigned watches, on the port or starboard side of the quarterdeck skirting the aft hatch. Six tired, wet, and utterly miserable men offer an unspoken prayer of gratitude to the High Authority. They are the port watch men, who have heaved and panted through six dragging hours of the afternoon – pulling ropes, and more ropes, and going back and pulling the same ropes again – working mechanically and aching for the sound of those six bells. For those bells ring out their watch and summon the new, leaving the aching six to snatch a bit of a meal and crawl

thankfully into a sloppy, sodden bunk for five hours' sleep – five hours of Nirvana!

But the six bells sound harsher in our ears. And so does the chief mate's order. '*Vakten skall vara på dack!*' The watch shall stand by on deck! Of course, such a procedure is insisted on and taken as matter of course where strict discipline in ships must be maintained. But we on the wind-jammers are used to a freer life.

On the order we go our several ways – silently, for our progress is soundless against the other noises; gingerly, for the night is utterly black and the heaving deck, with its taut capstan-fastened wire sheets, is dangerous; dolefully, for before us stretch five interminable hours. Gösta goes to the look-out and Einar to the wheel, to relieve the other two men of the port watch. The remaining six of us group ourselves on the quarterdeck outside the sail-workroom door. This position is protected in some degree by the officers' lavatory on the outside, and above by the poop deck, which juts out over a few yards of the quarterdeck. We whistle and jump and stamp our feet and fling our arms together in vain endeavour to keep warm. There is not long to wait and shiver. Two blasts from a whistle take us amidships, where we are promptly scattered by a thundering wave. Sorting ourselves out, we proceed to haul up the big sodden mainsail –

*beginn* they call it in Swedish – and all follow it aloft to make it fast to the yard. This in itself is herculean task enough for one night's work, and it is with benumbed and dull fingers and aching arms that we slither down the shrouds half-an-hour after we ascended, with the mainsail made fast up there.

We swing to the deck, to find that we have as yet made only a small beginning. An hour later, after more ropes and more sails, we form a depressed group under the shelter of the mainmast staysail, lowered to the deck and ungasketted. We have just finished taking the royals. It is blowing hell's hardest up there. By Jove! We notice the absence of gloves to-night. There is nothing particularly difficult about topmast gymnastics once you get the hang of it, provided one remembers the rule of 'one hand for the ship and one for yourself.' I find it sometimes safer to use two hands for myself, and to hell with the sail. It is quite safe, however, if one devotes one's left hand to the ship. It is good fun up there, and we are out of the sight of the mate when aloft.

Can the longshoreman picture himself leaning perilously against a swaying yard or pole, suspended vertically from a tall mast which rocks to and fro, with a single rope for a footing and a thin iron bar to clutch – working with cold stiff ropes and heavy flapping sails – clad from



tip to toe in oilskins – while past him shrieks a blast whipped at top speed from the land of the icebergs? If so, he can picture the sailor aloft in a howling breeze around Cape Horn. It seems to be the explanation of why so much suicidal rope is hanging around the masts.

Well, that job is over for a time, and we are now under the shelter of the staysail. A cigarette seems indicated, so I go under the f'c'sle to roll one. There is a light in Zetty's cabin. I sneak inside and with awkward clammy fingers, fumble with paper and tobacco. I get two puffs, and out it goes. This cursed salt-soaked tobacco! I am in the act of re-lighting it when the door of the cabin is wrenched open and a face as black as the sky outside thrusts itself in. Beneath the tempest I recognise the face of the captain.

This skipper is not one of the hoary old sea dogs that one reads about. At thirty-four, he has been everything about ships from cabin-boy in a pearling schooner upwards. He knows the Seven Seas in every mood from placidity to maelstrom-madness, and can sail any ship across them. He can curse, and speak fairly well besides, in a dozen languages, and has swilled the pot in twice as many lands. From it all he has emerged normally a quiet-eyed, frank, cheerful human being, fair-minded as a rule, and above all, a he-man. I can hardly say more of a

man who frequently tells me that a worm would disjoint its bloody back endeavouring to follow my steering. Now, however, he is evidently in a stinking temper. In the wind-jammer all deck lights are usually ordered out during a storm. I had not heard the order given to-night.

‘Hello, captain,’ I begin, cheerfully.

Wrong start, you damned fool! The storm breaks.

‘Vadder you doing in here? Aren’t you ordered to stand by?’

‘Came in to light a cigarette a moment ago, and found that the cursed tobacco was wet and wouldn’t burn. I saw the light and——’

‘So did I just see de bloody light, an’ its got no business to be alight.’

He lilts me a song that I am frequently hearing. It begins *mod. andante*, changes rapidly to *allegro tempestuoso*, and stops abruptly on the third note, *piano inferno*.

‘*Satan an’ SATan, an’ SATAN!*’

Poor soul! How can he, a disciplined sailor, trained under a score of scowling martinets, understand the silly philosophy of a young reporter who, on leaving the lift in the morning, meets simultaneously the Editor-in-Chief and the ‘smoking prohibited’ notice – a young cub who nods amiably at the one, and puffs a languid cloud of smoke at the other?

I try my hardest to feel a worm. It is not difficult. The captain slams the door in my wretched face, and stalks off. A minute later he pokes his head back through the doorway again.

‘An’ put that mook’n light out!’ he snarls.

I return to the shelter of the staysail, but I have my cigarette. The others are envious. I pass it round for two puffs to each man. Zetty tries to take three, but I snatch it back from him. Zetty says ‘uh!’ Soon there is the mate’s whistle, and we stumble aft to take in the spanker and spanker tops’l and mizz’n staysails.

So it goes on throughout the watch. We group ourselves at one end, and when the whistle blows we rush towards its sound. Too dangerous to linger amidships. We just rush for it, barking our legs on the wire sheets, capstans, and God knows what else, and being hurled against the deck-houses by waves. My legs are covered with bloody scabs left after previous storms, and my body is covered with bruises.

By midnight we have taken all sail but the foresail and three lower tops’ls. Eight bells! Out come the port watch, and both watches set to work to take in the foresail. At one o’clock, after six hours of it, Andrastyrman calls us aft, and gives us each *one liqueur-glassful of rum*. I could gulp the lot, bottle and all, without feeling it. And so we crawl again to bed. My hands are

really paining. They have gone numb two hours ago, and every rope I have touched since has seared my hands as though I had been grasping burning needle-points.

\* \* \*

Three hours pass in exhausted slumber. It seems but a few moments, and yet an eternity, when Santy comes and rouses us at four o'clock. We are now directly below Cape Horn, he tells us. Up again and into the same ghastly wet things, rescued from a dripping heap on the deck of our cabin where we had flung them. . . . The main brace block had broken, and Bertil had virtually taken charge of the watch. The mate was yammering, not having had experience of this in his career. Bertil had, though, and he had directed the repair operations, himself doing most of the work, sitting on the yard-arm with Pittson. The work occupied almost all of their watch.

The minute we got out on deck the same round started again; but this time not for long.

The mate's whistle——

Gösta and I are on the quarterdeck.

'De braces, de braces. *Kryss braces!*' screams Andrastyрман.

He is demented, standing clutching the windward cro'jack brace rope. He wants us to go over there and help him tighten it, a task as impossible as it is unnecessary. We make towards him, but

a wave crashes over, douches the mate, and sweeps us back whence we started. Another big wave is out there. We can see it coming. Banked high up like a tremendous crumbling wall. It will sweep over in a minute. We are nearly at Andrastyrman's side. He sees the wave outside, grabs Gösta by the arm, and rushes with him up the poop deck steps. At the top he drops Gösta and turns to me.

'Look out, down dere,' he screams. 'Come up here.'

There isn't time. I thud across the quarterdeck, clutch one of the iron poop supports, and swing on to the salt meat barrel. The wave curls up over the side, hangs there for a horrible second, and dumps itself with a sickening roar on the deck. The water rushes up to my knees, lashes my face, seeps through my scarf, down my neck. That horrible sensation of icy water on my stomach. It swells up under the leg of my oilskin trousers, and pours into my rubber seaboots. A minute later comes another wave, bigger than the last, and then a third, sweeping right over the poop and filling the quarterdeck as though it were a tank. I am swept away by the swirling powerful force of it. My hands are too numb to hold me to the iron support which I was clutching. My legs go from under me. I am carried along – where? Where am I? Floating somewhere in

water. Good Jesus Christ! Not overboard! Am I overboard? Out in that hissing mess where nothing can live or be saved. Am I out there, to feel my soul sloughing the dross of my cold flesh and bones? Am I out there to give a last despairing gurgle and sink and die? Where am I? To drown like a f'c'sle rat? — My mother stands before me in a vision — my sister — my brothers — my sweethearts — my friends — everybody that I know — there they stand, all speechless, watching silently — these faces that I know so well — faces that I love — living faces, but now expressionless, speechless — like so many pictures projected across a colourless, lifeless screen — what? What in hell is this dirty damned business. I am living. I am young, healthy, strong. I love life — where in hell am I? I do not pray, do not even think, beyond that burning question — where am I? . . .

My behind suddenly lands on something hard. It is the deck. Even at that I haven't time to laugh. The wave is running out and has deposited me against the poop steps on the lee side. I am no sooner there than there is a sudden jolt at my knee and something very solid hits me. Pain, sharp stinging pain, and then a sort of numbness. What the——? The iron head of a capstan-bar, broken loose with the force of that wave, has come racing down the deck, to hit me in the pit of the stomach.



This is too much altogether. I am absolutely fed up. I scramble up. Ooch! I can't put the left leg to the deck. Feels as though it is in a place where men get ruptured, but I am not quite sure of the symptoms. Oh, to hell with the whole lot of it! I am fed up, and furthermore, I am through. Definitely. Let's get this thing taped off. I am through! I crawl to the *skans* door, wrench it open, fling myself inside and pull the door after me just in time to avoid another huge wave which hauls itself aboard. Finished with that tommy-rot. I'm *sjuk* now. Enter me up in the log-book – *sjuk*, and bloody fed-up. Damn and blast these wet clothes! I rip them from me, leaving only my singlet, and chuck them to the floor in a sloppy heap. I scramble into bed, and pull the blankets close around. Now blow your bloody whistle! Blow, go on – blow, like silly hell. I shall not be there.

\* \* \*

For hours, it seems, I lie. Nothing happens, except that at some period the numbness departs, and a sensation of intense pain takes its place. Nobody comes to me. That makes me bitter. Just as I thought! 'The Finns and Swedes are the finest fellows in the world.' Like hell they are! My thoughts are bitterly illogical and unfair. The devils, the murderous devils! Leaving me

here as though I were carrion. Cold and yet sweating with the pain, I doze and turn and awake with a yell, doze again and turn and awake with another yell. Ah, that's a good idea. Yell! I yell and scream blue murder. Something heavy crashes against the wooden boards which separate our *skans* from that of Bertil, Erik, and Pittson. A boot, probably. Go on, throw your boots! Throw your sea-chests. Throw any infernal thing. Throw your bloody selves at it. I'll yell if I want to. Who in hell d'you think you are? God?

Bells sound from the wheelhouse. How many? One is loud, there is a pause, and another faint one. The wind carries them away. I listen. Presently I catch them again on the f'c'sle. Three bells. Half-past-five. Coffee!

Gösta comes in with a steaming jug in his hand, dumps it on the table, curses it in Swedish for spilling on his hand, and lights the lamp. He looks towards me and comes across.

'*Du ar sjuk?*'

I show him the trouble. It is bruised black and blue and is swollen.

'Oh, hell. Very *sjuk*. Stay in boonk long time?'

'Yes.'

'How long time?'

'Till I'm better.'

'Uh.'

He gives me coffee. I feel much better after it, and sleep. At four bells I am awake again. The men are at work. Outside my window two of them are pumping fresh water for our drinking tanks and for the galley. They are occupied thus for an hour, as they have to dodge the waves. Bumpers are still coming over, but we are through the storm, past the Cape, and now heading slightly northwards, our course by the compass being N. 83° E.

‘*Och alltsa vi seglade nordvart,*’ Gösta is full of all the news of the last few hours.

We have done nearly two hundred miles since noon yesterday – an average of ten knots. All this Gösta tells me over coffee. Pretty good going we have made, considering we have practically no sail in the wind. The Cape Horn stream must have done it – carried us along where it would. Luckily to safety. The skipper was wise to keep sixty miles below land. The rapids are mere babbling brooks compared with this Cape Horn current when it gets a move on . . . Six bells . . . One bell . . . Now the port watch must get up to take over. The Frog is policeman. I hear him arousing the three next door. He is not very gentle about it. He goes out galleywards, and presently comes bearing food. Bertil, Erik, and Pittson eat in our *skans*. Those mysterious meatballs, potatoes, and coffee for breakfast. Well,

I might manage some potatoes and coffee. The Frog comes to my bunk.

‘You sick?’

Once again I exhibit my marks of battle. He is very sympathetic.

‘I don’ like Cap ’Orn,’ he says. ‘It is too much desert.’

He tells me how he was once in a French schooner during the days when ships went east to west around Cape Horn. They were on their way from France to Chile to collect a load of nitre. Strong westerly winds blew all the time, and the schooner was forced down to 70° S. and had to tack for 175 days before she could get around the Cape. Ice froze their ropes into the blocks. When they went aloft to take sail and clutched the yard-irons, their hands froze to them and the skin peeled off and stuck to the iron. Yet somebody has bestowed on that southern belt of islands the name, *Tierra del Fuego*. The Land of the Fire – ye gods!

The Frog gives me the news of the main *skans*. They were entirely flooded out during the night. Svenny got a terrific thwack over the eye while he was floating about the outside deck among a brace of capstan-bars which had broken loose. This would not have happened, says the Frog, if the mate hadn’t called them out to pull the main braces while we were collecting thunderous

seas. Svenny was knocked unconscious, and somebody just grabbed him in time to save him from going overboard.

'London is verree worried,' sniffs Frog. 'It mak' 'im sleep, 'e is so worried.'

'What, is he ill too?'

'Yes, ill like my sister,' he spits. "'E lie zere, talk to nobodee. I don' wan' talk to 'im. 'E not ze shen'leman. One, two, t'ree time I ask 'im for 'e's carpenter square for make a-a-a-a? He draws it for me. '- a calender, yes? 'E tell me 'e 'ave a square. T'ree time I ask 'im for lend to me, an' all 'e 'ave to do is open 'e's box. What 'appen? 'E will not open 'e's box an' let me 'ave it. 'E is one beeg lazee barstar'.'

The Frog departs. Soon comes Erik clad in a thick woollen suit of underclothes, with the seat inconveniently out of the trousers. He has wasted no time dressing, despite the cold, being too intent on cramming something – anything – into his central void.

'How are you to-morrow?' he asks.

'Bloody,' I tell him. Again the blankets go aside, and he makes an inspection. Bertil comes in and goes straight to his food. I tell them of the Frog and the carpenter's square. Erik goes one better. He generally does. The Frog has confided in him the secret of success. In his own words, *via* Erik, it is thus:

'Sometime I see somet'in', an' anudder time I see anudder t'in', an' each time I keep 'im in 'ere for all time' – tapping his noddle.

'He's damned clever though,' says Bertil. 'He showed me his chest the other day, and he has carved himself almost a complete set of tools out of scrap timber and a few sheets of steel he had with him.'

'What the deuce does he want with a set of tools?'

'He says when he leaves this ship he wants to settle down in a quiet village in Brittany and be a carpenter.'

'He are making better butcher, I t'ink,' says Erik. 'He are very clever wid de knife.'

'What's wrong with you?' Bertil turns suddenly to me.

'Hell, I'm getting sick of showing the damned thing around,' I laugh. But he has a look. Thoughtfully he drains his coffee mug. He tosses it on the table.

'By Jove! I do feel sick,' he mutters ingenuously, and goes out. . . .

Andrastyрман doesn't come near me. He'd better not. I would metaphorically up with my crutches and bash his head in. But somebody tells the captain I am sick, and the Old Man comes straight down to see me. He, too, is sympathetic, but treats it more as a hell of a joke



than the tragedy I imagine it. He fetches the steward with embrocation. There is no ship's doctor on most of these Scandinavian long-traders. The steward keeps a medicine chest, and the crew trust mostly to luck. Bertil has told me of an extraordinary operation that took place in the barque *Beatrice* when he was among her crew. One of the fellows went down with acute appendicitis and something had to be done. The chief mate had studied surgery for some years, and knew roughly what had to be done. The sick man would probably die, anyway, so the chief took a chance. He had no instruments for such an operation. He simply took the belt-knife with which he scraped teak, cut rope, and did odd jobs about the ship. He sharpened it to a razor edge on the grindstone, sterilized it thoroughly, gave the man an anæsthetic himself, and successfully extracted his appendix, *and the man lived and is living to-day.*

\* \* \*

Five days and nights have passed, and we are now heading northwards in the South Atlantic, thirty-six sailing days from Melbourne Heads. Our position at noon yesterday was S.  $50^{\circ} 35'$  and W.  $55^{\circ} 57'$ . Thus we are above the Falklands. Three days ago we encountered a head wind and were forced west until we were almost up between the Falklands and Patagonia. This stretch

is wider than the Baltic, says Erik, but 'de kapten are afraid to go up dere.' A more favourable wind springs up next day, we doubled on our tracks and came outside again into open sea. That lost us two days' progress, and gave us some pretty tough weather. This is a bad piece along here. But the following night we had the biggest thrill since Melbourne. (We had seen no sign of civilisation beyond a guana-covered island in Bass Strait.) It was just before midnight. Bells sounded from the look-out, though none had come from the helmsman. The *utkik* had seen something outside. These signals are: One bell to starboard, two to port, and three straight ahead. Everybody was immediately alert. Two bells – the port warning! I squirmed across to Ek's bunk and looked out of his porthole. It pained like hell leaving my bunk, but I was determined to see what was going on. Things like this cannot be ignored on the long-trader. Everybody has to see the fun.

Above the horizon ninety degrees port came a dim flash. *Blixt?* No, this was no mere lightning, but a definite sign of human life. Cape Pembroke Lighthouse, East Falkland, somewhere over there beyond the horizon. Cape Pembroke with its huge powerful light, visible fourteen miles away, staring out across sea and sky as a warning to ships and a reassurance to mariners. We must

have been twenty or thirty miles away, for we saw only the dim reflection across the sky. A great cheer went up from all that watched it. The famous fire of St. Elmo could not have been a greater comfort to a little band of sailors than was Cape Pembroke to us.

\* \* \*

The door bursts open and the steward's fat pimply face projects itself inside.

'Beeg feesh! Beeg feesh!' he gasps, gesticulating excitedly towards the starboard side. There is the sudden cracking of a revolver. I drag myself to the door. Erik comes over and lifts me across to the side. Everybody is out to see the new fun. The wind has died down and the sea heaves gently, slowly, vastly. A spout of water shoots up, and is followed by a terrific gasping sound, and out of the sea rises the colossal bulk of a whale's back. Four bullets sink into the great body before the broad tail flashes up and down again. Andrastyrman, with a look of fiendish glee on his face, is shooting at it. Up comes the whale, and the mate empties the chamber into it. The whale takes no notice. He probably thinks somebody is heaving mud pies at him. Erik carries me back to the bunk. He proceeds to give me a long and dreadfully graphic account of how whales make love. The fellow knows everything.

\* \* \*

It is good to lie here and sleep. Gösta occasionally brings me food. Our boys are hoisting all the sail again. Presently I hear the order to man the capstan for the mizz'n upper to'gn'sail. The halyard for this sail comes down to a block just outside my porthole. I watch them heaving at it. Clickety-click, clickety-click! Yo-heave-ho, my hearties. Softly I hum the Volga Boatmen's dirge. With a capstan-bar it takes about twelve paces to complete one circuit about the capstan. Unconsciously I find myself counting the clicks that go to hoist the sail. Round and round they go, like donkeys tied to a stake. Round and round. Clickety-click, clickety-click! About eight clicks per revolution. It takes them about fifteen minutes to get the halyard down and the sail out in the breeze. By this time my score is three-thousand three-hundred-and-forty clicks – just two clicks short of 418 revolutions. Say eight yards to every revolution, that's nearly two miles of heaving. Well, that's two miles that I haven't heaved. The satisfaction and warmth following this reflection send me to sleep again.

\* \* \*

I awake with a start a little later. Something that sounds like a shower of stones descends to the roof of our *skans*. Outside there are raucous shouts of laughter. It is the fortieth day, and most of the pain is gone from my leg, although

it is still with difficulty that I walk. I hobble to the door and look out, to find beyond a field of white glistening brilliantly under the weak sun of these parts. The field piles up higher as I watch. The heaviest fall of hail we have had, and the most beautiful. Falling hail in sunlight. Most gorgeous sight! There is another rough roar of laughter, and past the side of the *skans* on his backside, shooting at mad speed along the deck and sending up a pretty shower of stones as he goes, is Bramsson. Others follow. It is great fun, and after my recent self-congratulation I feel a pang of regret, that I cannot slide along on my buttocks with the others.

The scene of action swiftly changes to the poop. Andrastyрман is leaning against the railing, watching the boys in their fun with a grin on his face, serenely unconscious that creeping up behind him, with a larger grin on his face and a big ball of dripping ice in his hand, is the chief mate. I instinctively wince as that cold ball thuds and spatters about Andrastyрман's neck. Then begins a battle royal between the two mates. Andrastyрман scoops up a handful and hurls it at the chief, who retreats a few paces to where he has built himself a supply of ammunition. The skipper comes out when the battle is at its height and steps back just in time to avoid one that goes over the chief's head. He dives

into it, and proceeds to pelt the mates in turn, making few mistakes, and ejaculating:

‘Bastard! Didn’t I tell you you came from Texas!’

It becomes a cut-throat game – triangular. The t’ird hears the noise, rushes up, and sides with the captain.

There is a cold draught of air as a hail-ball whizzes past our door. I look to its source, and two of the boys are having a pelting match of their own. Soon the entire ship is turned into a field of ice-battle which lasts half an hour. Little groups are everywhere, engaged in separate encounters. The steward gets one in the neck from the cook while he is boiling salt meat. He deserves it! The cook takes shelter behind the stove as the steward throws one back at him. They stand, one at each end of the *kabyss*, scooping up hail from the deck, balling it, and hurling it at each other.

All big boys! It does one’s heart good to see it. Thank goodness all men don’t have to grow up!

\* \* \*

The men have been taking turns of ‘going sick’ for a day at a time. The officers don’t raise any objection. I think the captain must have given instructions that the boys should be allowed one day’s sickness each, to recover from the roughness we have left behind. But there is a



wave of indignation at my protracted 'rest.' They don't seem to believe I have been ill at all, and they regard it as a bit too much of a good thing when I make a picnic of it like this. London brings me whisperings. When Bertil comes in again I tackle him.

'Do you think I should be out on deck?' I ask him.

'That is your affair,' he replies, rather shortly.

'Exactly,' I agree. 'You might pass that tip around the main *skans*.'

The Frog is the next to go *sjuk*. London now keeps me informed about the doing in the main *skans*. London has been sick, really sick, and has had a pretty rotten time of it. He was too ill to leave his bed, and nobody thought of taking him his food. For two days he went hungry. The others simply ate his as well as their own. He spent the close of the second day cursing them as they passed his bunk. He called them terrible names. Nobody knifed him. Now it is the Frog's turn. He has been sick for forty-eight hours, and the boys are eating his share.

No sooner has London gone than I hear the Frog out on the quarterdeck addressing the captain.

'How are you coming on?' asks the captain.

'I 'ave got not'ing to eat for forttee-eight hours' – very indignantly.

'Vad you got?'

'No, I 'aven't got!'

'Vad?'

'Eat!'

'Did you get relief?'

'I 'ave got not'in' to eat for forttee-eight hours.'

'I don't un'erstand you. Did de salts give you relief?'

'I don' want salts. I want somet'in' to eat.'

'Vell, v'y in hell don't you dam 'well eat somet'ing?'

'Zere is not'in' for to eat. Jus' enough for five mans, an' seven mans are eatin' it. I get not'in'.'

'Oh! Is *that* why you are sick?'

There is a menace in the emphasis. I hear the Frog retiring . . . Time passes . . . The next watch the Frog is out on deck again, silently sewing a patch on a torn sail. He made a miraculous recovery, and has had somet'in' to eat.

\* \* \*

Slanting rain, driven before a squall, obscures the horizon. There seems no beauty beyond my porthole window. A big sea is running, and water swishes with that monotonous wet sound about the deck. Every few minutes a ponderous wave with no definite aim in life hurls itself with a sickening thud against the luff side, and a good three-quarters of it breaks across the deck with a crash like a flight of thunderbolts biting the earth.

I have no Kokoish passion for such phenomena, and when a whole fusilade of them play leap-frog over the roof of the flimsy deckhouse in which I have my being – to say nothing of the suitcase containing precious shore clothes, a still more precious typewriter, and my £8 10s. in Australian currency – it more than tries the patience. Truly, a trip like this places an abnormal strain on the patience – or is it tolerance? – of men. Gösta is still whistling, *rondo-repetito*, those two bars of the Swedish shanty he likes so much better than the complete composition. He is sitting, his legs dangling over the edge of his upper bunk, sewing the behind in a pair of blue twill trousers, in preparation for the tropical weather to come, and whistling – with a deadly, tense, half-minute between each repetition of the spindly, whistled notes. Quite apart from this scourge, my mind is far from composed. But I dare not say anything to him, for if I do, he will whistle all the harder. As it is, he might suddenly forget to whistle. I dare not remind him that he is whistling. I must wait with stiffened body and taut nerves until his pre-occupation with the behind of his trousers drowns his great love for music.

There have been six weeks of it – six long, dragging weeks. Even the most wave-battered of the sailors I am among say that it takes them the

first three or four weeks of these long passages to get used to the prolonged isolation. This revelation gives me but momentary satisfaction. I have a headache, a putrid meal in my withered belly, a poisoned splinter-scratch on my finger, and am still limping and confined mostly to bed owing to my leg injury. There is no sympathy in the attitude of my f'c'sle fellows. Rather there is an ill-concealed resentment. The Scandinavians do not come to my bunk frankly to accuse me of slacking, but the inference reaches me second-hand. What little of their company I enjoy is like a pill of sugar-coated quinine. London has made them aware that in my infirmity I have taken to studying them and their attitude as a spare-time occupation, and the microscope increases their resentment to the point of silent sullenness. It makes an extraordinarily interesting situation. It seems that the Swedish sailor does not speak his mind – unless he is an exceptional man like Nils or the Captain – but prefers to keep his real thoughts hovering behind a veil of suggestiveness that is abominable.

Moreover I am fed up with the dirt that is everywhere, although we have been cleaning the ship ever since we left Victoria. It seems to me we make more damned mess cleaning things than we would if we left them alone. Personally I stink, and I am not used to stinking. Dirty

clothes, dirty body, dirty bunk – (one of the pigs left his effects on my head-cushion one day when I had it on deck to dry in a snatch of sunshine: it has been impossible to remove all traces of the outrage) – dirty food, dirty dishes to eat it in, dirty work to be done, dirty faces to greet me, a dirty mirror to reflect my own dirty dial, dirty officers, and a dirty ship – everywhere dirt. It is nauseating, and my senses rebel.

I lie and glower at the dirty ceiling four feet above my eyes. Curse that ceiling! I have stared at it for six weeks, have counted its fly specks, and know it as a child knows a piece of wishy-washy nursery doggerel. I have communed with it when my thoughts have cried for expression. My deepest thoughts are engraved on that cursed ceiling. And now, as I stare at it, it mocks at me, turning over the pages of those dismal thoughts one by one, and forcing me to examine, weigh, and analyse each word – like a rebellious schoolboy plodding through the Latinised version of Julius Caesar's exploits. In a sudden rage against that ceiling, I spit at it, jump up and pull on my wet seaboots, wade across the cabin floor, and heave open the door. Simultaneously, another whale of a wave leaps up and comes spurting playfully across the deck. It hits the aft hatch and rises in a joyful lunge towards me. And rain is still falling. Water, water, every-damned-where, and

not a bloody thing to drink! I stamp up and down the waterlogged twelve-feet-by-five that comprises the deck space of our *skans*, muttering blood and thunder to myself, trying vainly to remember what the Lord Chancellor dreamt after he crossed the Channel from Harwich in something resembling a very small second-class carriage – doing anything, in fact, to find some interest that will distract my attention, and take my mind far away from this infernal ship and its inhabitants. I reach towards my improvised bookshelf and glance at the title of the haphazard choice I have made.

*A Treatise on The Psychology of Insanity.* The innocent little volume thuds back whence it came, and I try rummaging in Gösta's chest of papers. *Rob Roy* is beginning to lose its attractiveness in reading, though I am grateful for the softness of the paper on which it is printed. I shall double my daily instalments, and get rid of it quicker. Maybe this will help to keep me a little cleaner, too. The other stuff is mostly in Finnish and Swedish and defies my efforts at translation, and – hello! what's this? *Krigs röpet*. Of quarto size, and looks vaguely familiar. Underneath the title are the words, '*Officiellt organ for Frälsningsarmén i Finland.*' Below this again, '*William Booth, Frälsningsarméns stiftare.*' On the left-hand side, '*Bramwell Booth, General.*' Dated, Hel-



singfords, July 9, 1927. So the old *War Cry* goes up among the gentle Finns! By Jove! What an opportunity this sheet will afford. Poor old *Rob Roy* can have a rest until I dispose of this. That'll show my sweet contempt for the Sa———

My thoughts fly back to my last Sunday morning in Melbourne. Vaguely I recall it as having followed a night before. Bena gives me a gentle dig in the ribs and leaves a tray bearing fragrant coffee and succulent toast and marmalade. I dispose of it, and roll over for further sleep. Just as my sixth and final sense is settling down, a shrill shrewish voice is raised against me in demandantic query, 'Would you know why I love Jesus?' The well-meaning lady might draw a world of soliloquy from the question, but to me the matter of getting some more sleep is of more pressing concern. Mechanically I begin to count little white sheep gambolling through a gate. Again comes the query, this time followed by a tune about a river. Some talk about gathering at the river. 'Ole man river, dat ole man river, he mus' know somet'in', but don't say——' No. Heard it last night at the Rex. Danced too long to it, in fact. Don't wanner dance now. Wanner sleep. 'Would you know why I——?' No, damn you. Don't wannerknowatall! 'Would you——?' Oh, hell! Stealthily I arise and go to my gramophone, and turn its face to the street below,

whence comes the clamour. I select a record and a loud needle, adjust the sound wave indicator to the 'blare' position, set the automatic stop, and climb into bed. My gramophone puts forth a lively retort, 'Will ya tak' ya finga outer ya mouth, be-cos I wanner li'l kiss from yuh!' . . . I sleep undisturbed till lunch. . . .

As I gaze on *Krigs Röpet*, these recollections of blissful days come before me, and my present rotten surroundings fade into a dismal background. Ah! the beauty of those strong wings of fancy and of memory! When I have time, I think I shall turn Yoga. It must have tremendous advantages.

\* \* \*

Dusk has fallen when I am summoned to the captain. He is on the poop. What on earth does he want with me? Certain misgivings, arising out of a guilty conscience, cause me to adopt a tactical limp suggestive of greater pain than I am actually suffering. I rehearse this, much to Gösta's amusement, up and down the *skans* for several minutes until I am proficient and, guardedly, I proceed to the poop. But the captain is kindness personified: I have greatly misjudged him. He points towards the South Celestial Pole.

'Magellan clouds,' he says simply.

His pointing finger directs my gaze, before

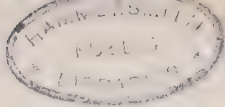
which stands an extraordinary and very beautiful sight low down in the heavens – a mass of milky-looking clouds in curious formation. In appearance it might be a forest of lacey trees set on the silver shores of Valhalla, so exquisitely mysterious it seems. The vision sobers me, and I am suddenly not so lonely. I hum the *Ride of the Valkyries*. The sound of the valkyr horses' drumming hoofs, and the fierce cries and laughter of Brünnhilde and her companions seem almost to echo over those mysterious cloud-tops.

'What remarkably beautiful clouds, captain.'

'Dey aren't clouds, dey're stars,' he says.

We linger, chatting, on the poop awhile. He is in delightful mood and tells me many things about the stars, the sea, and ships. For a quarter of a century he has lived among them, and knows them as a man knows his family. The skipper speaks with real emotion as he tells me:

'Vhen I am on de poop I have to keep de whole ship before me. I must keep her as I might hold an apple in my hand. Sailing before a strong breeze, all my heart is in it, an' I feel like a part of de ship. I feel de strain on de masts, on de sails, as t'ough it were a strain on my own heart. An' I must look ahead all the while, too, to see what is beyond dere. . . .'



## C H A P T E R   V I

IT began when we were shivering our timbers before the onslaught of the Brave Westerlies. Since then Bertil, Erik, London and I have been arguing about 'Who Won the War' – arguing fiercely. We have our several reasons. Erik and I started it for argument's sake, because he is fanatically pro-German and I am just as pro-British Empire. Bertil regards it as a debating society in which he can brush up his English, and London entered the discussions because he helped to win the war and suffered its pangs.

'Germany have von de var, an' England have lost,' says Erik, one free Sunday forenoon, over a cup of stolen coffee. He quotes irrelevant theories of Goethe and Schopenhauer and stray remarks let loose by Bismarck, to prove his statement.

London and I have progressed beyond merely saying this is absurd. If we do not produce some fact or figure to put Erik off his stride, it resolves itself into an uninteresting 'No she didn't – yes she did' competition, the winner being the one who registers the most no-she-didn'ts or yes-she-dids.

‘Then ’ow do you account for the fact that we’ve got a king and Germany ain’t?’ asks London, pertinently.

This always staggers Erik for a moment, but he is quick to recover and take a new line of offensive.

‘If America are not coming in, den de English army are being smashed to little pieces,’ he retorts.

‘But,’ say I with triumphant gesture, ‘America is coming in, and the English army are *not* being smashed to little pieces. No, but the *German* army are.’

‘Was it fair that America should come in, then, and win the war?’ asks Bertil.

‘America did *not* win the war,’ I hasten to declare. ‘England wanted more soldiers, and she found she could buy them from America. It was not America’s war. As far as she was concerned it was purely a business deal. Now England is paying for those soldiers, and quite right too. It was a commercial proposition, anyway – the whole damned four years’ worth.’

‘America’s bleedin’ us for it now,’ says London, with approved bitterness.

‘Well, I don’t agree,’ I tell him. ‘The position was put to me by a clear-thinking and clear-minded American. The U.S.A. money that went into the war was given in exchange for war bonds

by people all over America. Picture a middle-west farmer, who has saved a few thousand dollars and put it into bonds. Don't you think he wants his money back? Wouldn't you want your bloody money back?

'The American Government ought to pay it, then,' says London.

'Why? Weren't there the same sort of loans – war loans – in England and all over the Empire? Did the Governments pay back our loans? Or did the people who invested the money say they didn't want to bleed the poor war-stricken Governments for it. If I'd been old enough and rich enough to invest any money in war bonds I would have taken fine care I got my money back with a spot of interest added.'

'There is not friendship in business,' chimes Bertil.

'This isn't business,' complains London. 'We're bein' bled.'

'So's Australia being bled. So's every wretched country that has politicians and no statesmen,' I snort. 'Take my own case. I wanted to get out of Australia to have a look about. What happened? Before I could get a passport I had to pay nearly two years' income tax to get a clearance from the department. How's that for a spot of blood?'

'England are afraid she are losing Canada to



America,' persists Erik, anxious to steer us back into national channels.

'Rot!' says London.

'Also she are afraid she are losing India,' continues Erik.

'Worse rot!'

'I believe you'd start a blasted war between England and somebody else if you had a chance, you dam' dachshund,' I accuse Erik.

'Nez,' he grins. 'If any man are hitting me, I are defending 'self. But I are not taking part in other men's vars.'

'War is wrong to hell,' opines Bertil.

'So's that blinkin' Boche sittin' there,' grunts London.

And so it goes. Erik will not be squashed. We were speaking recently about north polar expeditions – a subject in which the Swedes are intensely interested. I mentioned something about Stefansson, and both Erik and Bertil complacently denied there was such a man, or at least that he had ever been near the North Pole. I asked them to consult their books of reference when they went home to Sweden. Neither will believe me.

It is a great mental stimulation, this arguing. We get pretty mad about it sometimes, but we would go madder if we didn't argue. The greatest difficulty about being in an isolated ship like this among people who speak only a little of the

languages you know, is that soon one gets to expect certain speeches from them and is never disappointed. And Swedish swearing is so monotonous. London is beginning to realize the futility of self-sufficiency. That is why he so whole-heartedly entered our debating circle.

Erik entertains me more than any man I have met. He is full of statements that are mostly wrong, and he will throw his whole weight into an argument. But when it comes to work, he adopts quite a different philosophy. He studiously avoids unnecessary labour wherever possible. I have known him to sit for three hours in the f'c'sle closet to avoid certain distasteful tasks. He has a most amusing habit on deck when we are all hauling the sail ropes. He stands on the fringe of the crowd, darting in and out and among, and jostling to make it appear he is looking for something to do, while it is quite evident he intends doing nothing.

This habit extends to the Frog. One night there was a whistle from Andrastyrman to square up the yards to a good wind that had suddenly veered from starboard to aft, and was now on our tail. We had been on close-haul tack, and the squaring of the yards called for considerable effort. Nils, as usual, acted as yodeller.

*'Ol na, aho, ahe. Lite' till, litet mera, engång till,'*

he bawled, and we all moved in unison against the heavy brace-ropes. 'Aho, pull in de slack dere,' he added to the Frog.

'Zere ain't no slack,' howled the Frog, grunting far more than his efforts warranted.

'Ain't no not'ing,' says Nils with a curse. 'You bloody slack 'self.'

Nils and the Frog are at loggerheads. One calls the other 'at goddam Franceman' and the other regards the first as 'barstar' Red Indian.'

Tempers are short and rapidly getting shorter. Our speed is diminishing as we approach to the semi-tropical south-east trade wind belt. We are logging anything from fifty to one-hundred-and-fifty miles a day, and the wind is exceedingly variable. We have to take advantage of every gust that comes our way, for we are now in one of the famous doldrum belts. Consequently we have to square up the yards, haul them round, haul them back, and round again, at tiringly frequent intervals. This means much hard work at night as well as during the day, and we are getting little rest. Moreover the food is not improving, and a more careful check has to be kept on water rations.

It is now the forty-seventh day, and we are moving very slowly. By eight bells we have covered only fifty miles since yesterday's noon recording. The faint breeze that we have is

gradually dropping, and the sails are flapping. London and I are doleful. He is anxious to get home to London and his wife and son that he adores. He shows me photographs of them in various moods. Wherever he goes he carries with him one of those pretty kid letters that youngsters write. This one he received in Australia. It had spurred him with a great longing to get home again, and in despair he signed on the crew of the barque. I appraise his photographs and letter. I show him my own collection and he appraises mine. We get on very well together, except for occasional differences which, it seems, must always occur between Englishmen and Australians. Why, God knows. I complain of the condescending attitude of Englishmen that go to Australia. He retorts by pooh-poohing the great opportunities dangled before the nose of the unsuspecting migrant. Opportunity? Bah! He is a machine tool-maker by trade. When he went to Australia House no questions were asked as to why he wished to migrate, or what he should do when he got to Australia. When he reached Australia he found there was no call for the production there of machine tools. Australia received him coldly, treated him coldly, and bade him a cold adieu. Well, whose fault was that? Australia's? England's?

‘What about the thirty-four million quid Britain has lent Australia for development purposes?’ he snaps.

‘What about the British representation in the administration of it?’ I snap back.

\* \* \*

Here beginneth at the forty-eighth day. By this time I am on deck again, but only for light work. A sort of convalescence. Andrastyрман encourages me to do as little work as possible without actually putting it into so many words. Our breach is healed, and I have reached a stage when I don’t care whether I am friendly outwardly or not. The only deciding issue is that when I go aft to give him lessons I can learn many of the things that I want to know. For instance, I am able to plough at will into Findlays’ remarkable *South Atlantic Sailing Directory*, one of the world’s most informative and at the same time interesting volumes.

I have refused to take turns at the wheel until I can no longer feel the throbbing strain on my leg. I settled that two or three nights ago when Marty was dispatched from the main *skans* to ask me to take first wheel in the following watch. Evidently they had held some sort of meeting about me. I was very firm with Marty, and told him quite definitely that I would not take the wheel yet.

‘Vell, you are dam’ bloody,’ he said.

‘And you’re a pie-faced throwback,’ I told him.  
And that settled that. . . .

This forty-eighth day we have doldrums, good and proper. It is midday, and since noon yesterday we have shifted fourteen miles, according to the log-book. I don’t know whether the movement has been forwards, backwards, or sideways. There is no indication in the book of words. We are roughly  $33^{\circ}$  S. and should get the south-east Trade Wind any time now. All day long we are getting the trade sails ready. We spend much of our time down in the sail locker hauling them about. Two or three men from each watch have gone on to day-work. This means that they work from six a.m. to five p.m., and then are free until the next day. Nils, Zetty, and the Frog have gone from our watch, and Bertil, London, and Putte from the port. London worked it through being friendly with the chief mate, who seems to be treating him extraordinarily well. They chat most of their watches. The chief is a very decent fellow, and is easily the most popular of the mates. He goes through life with a cheerful philosophy and, like most of the men, is not one to give a rusty piece of iron three taps of a scaling hammer when two taps are enough. These day men are called in whenever the working watch has a hard job to do. We



are glad of their assistance in getting the trade sails up from the locker out on deck.

Grubbing for sails in the sail-locker is like going out on a mushroom hunt in an unknown field full of large stones which cannot be seen through the morning mist until one trips over them. The sails are rolled, carpet fashion, and lie one atop the other to a considerable height. The confusion resulting from a search for an upper to'gn'sail will be better understood when it is realized that there are more than thirty sails rolled up and stored together. Also that the shortest of the yard sails – the royal – is fifty feet across. The largest – the mainsail – is eighty-six feet across and thirty feet deep. It is no easy job finding any one sail from among an intertwined pile of thirty others by the light of a hurricane lamp. When it is found it is hauled up the sail-locker steps and out on deck. There it is spread and examined for wears and tears. The skipper and Bertil and the Frog are sewing like scalded cats to get the sails in order. We are bending at the rate of two, three, sometimes four, sails a day. Bending and unbending is great fun – it means going up and sitting astride the yards, far out of reach of the deck and the mate. If you loaf and the mate asks what is wrong, you can think of half a dozen things to tell him. We generally tell him to go to hell. He seldom contradicts if we feel inclined

to offer any excuse, and he doesn't bother to climb all the long way up to find out whether we are liars or not. We are not the only ones tired. Provided we are far enough up, say, on the top-gallant yards, we can while away a pleasant half-hour or so with a game of darts against the topmast, using our bowie knives as darts. Marty and I were having a game this morning when my knife missed the mast and whizzed to the foredeck, narrowly missing the carpenter, who was gazing upwards. Hell! Might have gone in the fellow's eye. Marty, who has tried many times in vain to borrow Zetty's wood-saw, says he wishes it had.

Looking out from the topmast affords a unique view to the horizon which surrounds the gently billowing ocean. Just a thin line all around. Hemmed in by horizon! One entirely forgets the ship and the work in gazing around the whole three-hundred-and-sixty degrees. I fancy I can see to the ends of the earth, like the old geographers. Bertil tells me, however, that the visible horizon, at ordinary deck level, is but a bare dozen miles from the naked eye. I suppose up here on the topmast I can see about sixteen or twenty. Strange! It seems that the space which lies before me must be infinite. Just like life itself. A mockery! A mirage!

\* \* \*

We are in the latitude, and some fifteen degrees

west, of that interesting triangular group of isles known as Tristan da Cunha. The ship is still idling along, lolling listlessly in a breeze which one minute blows like a cracked bellows and the next minute doesn't blow at all. I am sitting aft, at the officers' mess table, reading the sailing directory for the Ethiopic and smoking the second mate's cigarettes. These are a bad German brand which went out of production before the war. They leave a horrible taste in the mouth, but there is nothing better aboard. The steward bought them cheap somewhere. My own cigarettes gave out long ago, and I was forced to smoke the German ones. But now the steward has no more of these left, and I have to smoke that thin spindly tasteless stuff done up in long blue packages, or else dig into the second mate's supply. He doesn't know how to smoke them properly himself, so I might as well show him. After so-called lunch to-day, I had a standing-up as-far-as-possible bath, and shaved all except a straggling line that at last shows some sign of becoming a moustache. I challenge anybody to take a three months' wind-jammer trip without having a shot at a moustache. We are all beginning to get clean again. There has been no shaving, and very little washing, aboard for weeks. Bristling hair affords good protection against hail.

I am supposed to be giving Andrastyрман a spot of tuition in English this afternoon. But Tristan da Cunha is much more interesting. So I have bribed the mate with my typewriter, and have now settled to read. Andrastyрман is as happy as a child with a new toy.

Mr. Findlay's directory takes me through the history of Tristan up to 1816 when it was annexed by Britain. Previously the French and Portuguese and various others had had a finger in the pie of ownership at various times. Then it goes on to tell me that Tristan is at present (about 1820) the domain of an interesting community of English people whose manners, simplicity, and excellence of character are reminiscent of the somewhat similarly placed family upon Pitcairn Island in the Pacific. 'Children of Nature,' the inhabitants style themselves. The story goes on:

'In the London papers of April, 1824, there appeared the following statement – "The island of Tristan da Cunha has now upon it, living in great happiness, twenty-two men and three women. The *Berwick* (Captain Jeffery) from London to Van Dieman's Land, sent her boat ashore on the 25th of March, 1823. The sailors were surprised at finding an Englishman, of the name of Glass, formerly a corporal in the artillery, and the rest of the above-mentioned population. He is Governor, by appointment of the rest, on

account of his military character; and he trades in a small schooner to the Cape of Good Hope with the oil of the sea elephant, and the skins of the seal, which they catch in great abundance. Glass gave so favourable an account of the island, which is only nine miles in diameter, that it may be of importance to vessels, on their passage to Van Dieman's Land, to touch there; they will be sure of a most favourable reception. There are on the principal island of the group (Tristan) plenty of pigs, goats, potatoes, cabbages, etc., and abundance of fish and excellent water. This little colony had, at the time, upwards of eighty tons of potatoes to dispose of. The island is very fertile, in fact, in everything desirable to settlers; and Glass declared that if they had but a few women more, the place would be an earthly paradise".'

'The following document is as curious as it is honourable to the Islanders:

"We, the undersigned, being three of the principal inhabitants of the island of Tristan da Cunha, do hereby agree to furnish any respectable middle-aged people (as man and wife) who are willing and capable to undertake the office of schoolmaster and schoolmistress, with house and all necessities for their subsistence, as well as to present them every year at Christmas with a tenth part of the amount of

sale of our produce, so long as the school-master and mistress shall conduct themselves with propriety, and choose to remain with us. And we do further agree, that any person sent to us with a certificate of good conduct, and necessary qualifications, signed by the Governor of the Cape of Good Hope, or by Admiral Warren, the Naval Commander-in-Chief, shall be considered by us eligible to the situation, and their passages to this island paid to the master of any merchant vessel bringing them, immediately on their arrival, the sum of passage-money having been agreed upon by either the Governor or Admiral before-mentioned.

Signed by us, at Tristan da Cunha, this 17th day of January, 1834, on board his Majesty's brig *Forrester*, in the presence of Commander Booth, R.N.

W. M. GLASS, Governor.

RICHARD RILEY, his X mark.

JOHN TAYLOR, his X mark'."

\* \* \*

'Fair laughs the Morn, and soft the Zephyr blows' – we have caught the gentle south-west trade wind, just below 30° S. It is early morning and quiet, and the world is filled with that freshness and fragrance which one associates with early spring – or porridge, on a still, misty morn. No engine to disturb this sea of living, colourful



tranquillity – just a quiet course of some five or six knots. Our ship noises do not break the peace, for they have become a part of us – the clatter of dishes in the *kabyss* – the mellow ring of the carpenter's hammer against the anvil – the distant sweetness of Nils's soft tenor crooning a Swedish shanty away up somewhere in the tall rigging – the gentle splash of little waves breaking against our sides like the sound of the gondolier's oar – truly a morning of gladness in a world of blue.

We are on the pre-breakfast watch, and a beautiful sunrise has recently unfolded itself before us. All our sails are set for the breeze, and these belly softly and whitely against the rainbow-coloured sky. All around the sea is luculently blue, with patches of gold and salmon reflected from the heavens. Marty and I have the best job of the morning – filling the tanks. We are now on the poop, drawing pails of salt water for the captain's private closet tank. Einar stands at the wheel having an easy time of it. Rather, he lolls against the teak circle, idly giving it an occasional flick of the spokes this way or that. I glance back at our wake to see how straight he is steering. Behind us lies a long undisturbed S. So I am not the only one who takes a few corners! The skipper tells me that if only I'd leave out the bloody curves when steering, we would be by the line now. . . . As I watch, my thoughts sail back

over that long wake which stretches behind us – back to where our friendly zig-zagging albatrosses left us before we reached Cape Horn – back through the zooming tearing Westerlies and Forties – back past Williamstown and Anchorage and across country to where an old square house is set in an old square garden, half-hidden by trees and hedges. By Jove! I am many thousands of miles from there now. The sense of travel has come to me, now that we have turned the Horn corner. Just over there is South America, Argentine; across there is the tip of South Africa. Australia is – why dammit! Australia is both ways, east and west. My sublime sentimentalising changes quickly to the ridiculous as I find I cannot decide in which direction to turn to gaze homewards. Marty settles the question for me.

‘If a pair of rats are being put toget’er for a year, how many rats shall t’ere be?’ he asks.

‘Aha! How many rats shall there be,’ I temporise, determined not to be caught by another of those silly damned Swedish puns.

‘T’ree-million t’ree-hundred-and-tventy-t’ous-and six-hundred-and-fifty-t’ree,’ he says with a nonchalant flourish.

Infernal damned cheek!

‘Tell me,’ I inquire politely, ‘are you by any chance related to God?’

Marty is not perturbed.

‘They teach us that in the Svedish schools,’ he replies, untying the knot on the bucket-handle.

Einar blows his nose and examines the initials carved deep in the wooden rim of the wheel.



## C H A P T E R   V I I

A LULLABY is different from all other music. In exactly the same way a trade wind is different from all other winds.

We have slowly tacked our way north-east until now we are in the Tropics, doing an even five to six knots, in the latitudinal twenties and zig-zagging between the twenty-five and thirty longitudes. From now until we are above the line we must watch the longitude carefully, the skipper says, for in those five degrees, when we come up below the line, we must look for the chance winds upon which we must rely to carry us through the dreaded equatorial doldrums. If we go farther west than thirty, or farther east than twenty-five, we are liable to lose this wind and land ourselves in trouble.

For poetic purposes this south-east trade wind is all that one could desire; but none of us is feeling particularly poetical just now. Most are anxious to get up north, creep or crab through the equatorial doldrums, up through the north-east trade and past the debacle of the northern Horse Doldrums, veer round into the North Atlantic Westerlies, avoid getting wrecked on the

treacherous Azores, and then over in a quick run to Queenstown or Falmouth for orders – our wheat cargo was unsold when we left Victoria, and nobody has any idea of where the ship will go from the port of order. There is not unanimity in this anxiety to get home, of course. Some of the men want nothing better than to hang around in the doldrums for an indefinite period – what village would be complete without its idiot? Erik wants to stay to complete his apprenticeship: he would rather sweat in the warm, shrinking, waterless Tropics, than freeze in the cold unsympathetic Baltic – the steward wants to stay partly because of homicidal tendencies towards the crew, and partly because more days mean more dollars to him – the Frog wants to linger because there's less chance of the gendarme butting in out here than there is ashore – Ek wants to stay because he is a smelly little boy – and as for Gösta and Einar, both sons of wealthy parents, Nils puts the case fairly well:

‘If you are hungry – no good food – you ’ant sleep – plenty of bad ’eat’er – you ’ant dis ship so long to hell, and you far up in de country – it is de first t’ree ’eeks dat are de baddest——’

He pauses dramatically to spit twice, re-light his pipe, and then spit once.

‘T’ese boys ’ant to stay here aboard ship – day ’ant no speed – dey ’ant not to come home and.

Why? So dat dey like it so long. Dey have friends home, who know dey are a'ay at sea – no 'ord of dem – dey like not to write home to deir mudders – so after four, five, six, maybe – eight mont's – dey come home – den dey are de heroes and.'

(Nils, alone of all Scandinavians I have met, has a queer habit of including his conjunctions at the wrong end of his phrases).

'Dat boy – Gösta, Einar – have money of his fadder – no school like me – no 'orry – 'at de hell! – (he spits twice again) – why not for? – heroes – plenty of girls and.'

Erik gives me almost the same answer after a lot of badgering.

'Why?' he echoes. 'I t'ink it are only for de adventure.'

'But you fellows are supposed to be here because of the good old Viking urge – that irresistible love for ships and the sea.'

'*Nez,*' he shows the old familiar sheepish grin. 'I are not loving dis goddam sea, also dis bloody old whip. I are liking to see de vorld, also de girls of all nations.'

'Sybarite!'

With some of them, of course, the necessity for carving a career comes first. There is no lack of keen young Scandinavians anxious to learn their craft in the old way of hemp and canvas. Bertil



tells me that in Sweden and Finland the young man, to get on in life, must move out into the world, owing to the overcrowded state of the professions and the offices. It is an honour for that young man to be taken aboard for the trip to Australia. Apparently it is a qualification as good as a public school training, and well worth the dirt and the bilge and the roughness. Many of these young Finns and Scandinavians are able to jump the ship in Australia, and so get a cheap migration passage. Many of them do. Many of them, I know, are the backbone of the Australian steeplejack trade – work for which the pay is extremely handsome. What's a steeple or two to them, though, after a night around Cape Horn or the Cape of Good Hope?

One of the boys here has given me a document embracing an extraordinary set of rules by which apprentices in Finnish ships are governed. He also gave me a few appropriate comments thrown in:

*Apprentices Must*

1. Do all work with the rest of the crew.
2. Help load and unload ship in port.
3. Be keen to learn in practical work, and receive theoretical instruction from the Captain. ('All he tell me is, "V'ere de bloody hell you are taking my shep now?"')
4. Be clean.

5. Not smoke, except with Officers' permission. ('De boys don't no vant to smoke dat stuff de peeg stooard give us.')

6. Not drink. ('Hell! He don't no give us any to drink.')

7. Take all medical requirements, together with doctor's certificate that they have such requirements. When joining ship must deliver them to steward. ('Stooard take medikin, and don't no give us v'en *sjuk*, dat beeg peeg!')

8. Join in serious prayer with the Captain. ('Dat ole bawsted don't know how to pray. All he say are, "By Chris"! can't you steer straight yet?"')

9. Take plenty of fresh water baths. ('Plenty vater bath v'en come bloody vater here on deck.')

10. Take plenty of gymnastics during the voyage. ('Goddam gymnastics all day up in rig.')

11. Receive instruction from the Captain in:

Swedish

English

Grammar

Writing

Mathematics

Algebra

Geometry

Trigonometry

Navigation

Nautical astronomy

Meteorology  
Deck work  
Shipbuilding (construction)  
Rigging  
Ship terminology  
Signalling (Morse and lamp)  
Shipping law  
Port declarations  
World geography  
Coastography

(N.B. – Apprentices must abide by these rules. The Captain may, at his discretion, alter any rule or rules, if the necessity arises).

And for the pleasure of sailing under this little batch, the apprentice has to deliver up his £30 worth of *Finskamark* to the owner before sailing. The money he takes aboard with him is placed under the care of, and administration by, the captain. And if the apprentice should happily fade from the scene when the ship reaches the port of outward destination, or at any other time during his apprenticeship, his parent or guardian is automatically indebted to the owner to the tune of another five thousand marks over and above the rest.

I am being paid at the rate of one shilling a month for exactly the same privileges as those enjoyed by the apprentices in this ship. And I

am not learning anything beyond what I pick up.

These apprentices are required to stick it for three years. The first year they work for love. If they survive that they become *lattmatros*, or ordinary seamen, and receive a few hundred *Finskamark* for their tenacity of purpose. The next step is *matros*, the exalted position to which Nils has attained, with a proportionate increase in *Finskamark*. There seems to be no age margin attaching to apprenticeship.

Nor do the captain and mates draw fortunes for their part in the affairs of the ship. First mates receive about £9 a month, and second mates about £6 a month.

London, Erik, Bertil and I are lying on the f'c'sle, deep in discussion of all these "orrible details," as London styles them.

'Is there much profit for the owner in a trip like this?' I ask Erik.

'Nez, I can't see how he are making de profit,' he answers.

'Wot I can't see is why these old barges are kept floatin' around, when there is better money in steamers – and a bloomin' lot less risk?' London says, feelingly.

'It is the best training for sailors,' explains Bertil. 'Who is to look to the safety of the big liners when they meet bad weather but those who have been through the shit like these fellows? It

is an unwritten law in Sweden that all ships' officers must have sailing ship experience before they are passed through.'

'Oh, that's all right,' argues London. 'But don't go tellin' me that this 'ere Finland is a sort of benyfit society runnin' these ships just to train the nice little boys to be sailors.'

'No, there's a point outside that,' I remind him. 'Many of the world's big ship-owners underwrite their own insurance. The owner of this line does. I was talking to one of the officers the other day and he said the owner could afford to lose one ship a year. So there must be something in the old tubs.'

'What about the poor bloody crew?' howls London.

'I suppose they have to take the risk of being in the particular ship that gets lost,' I suggest.

'That's nice, ain't it,' he smiles sarcastically. 'Well, if this 'ere ship goes down this 'ere trip somebody's goin' to 'ear more about it.'

'I'll bet they do,' I laugh. 'I'll bet you've got a choice little ghost waiting round the corner ready to pop out as soon as you're carrion. The sort of unpleasant moaning ghost that'd go and wail at a man the minute he went to bed on the first night of his honeymoon.'

'I expect even a ghost has his moments,' remarks Bertil, amid a general laugh.

'No, but if they only make a small profit on the trip, why try to scrimp a little extra by giving the crew crook wages and crook food,' says London.

'If you are putting de English "vhy" to de Finnish "vay" you are waiting plenty long time before you are knowing,' chuckles Erik. There is no love lost between the Scandinavians and the Finns.

'The wages really aren't bad according to Finnish standards,' Bertil tells us. 'And it is not the owner's fault altogether if our food is like this. It is for the steward to get decent grub. The owner makes a reasonable enough allowance, but he cannot tell what the steward is giving the men.'

'Then why don't they complain?' asks London.

Bertil shrugs. 'What is the use?' he says. 'The Board of Trade has nothing to do with Scandinavian or Finnish crews. In the old *Beatrice* we had very fine food.'

'Do you mean to tell me that the stooard puts a bit in his pocket at the expense of my stomach?' demands London, aghast at such felony.

'There would seem to be the evidence of what I am asked to eat,' I murmur.

'Blimey! An' I give'im a cigarette the other day!'

\* \* \*

'*Vad* for you boonk here?'



Gösta voices his curiosity at sight of me lying in prone, drowsy nakedness full under a tropical sun whose rays draw little beads of perspiration which roll from my body to the deck, although he is yet only midway to his meridional throne; — a shining god before whom I am delighted to prostrate myself.

Along by the maindeck is the Frog, fiddling and fussing over some object that is obscured by the interested presence there of Marty, Svenny, and Einar. Svenny's feet alone would obscure anything. Nearby the two pigs are stretched in ample grunting coma, sheltering as much as possible in the slight shadow cast by the donkey-house.

'*Vad* for you boonk here?' repeats Gösta.

'Want to make body brown. Make ready for plenty hot by the Line,' I murmur sleepily. 'Plenty hot, *mycket bra*.'

'You vant more varm!' he echoes amazedly. '*Forbannat* boogery, I have too much some varm' — passing a hand over his hot brow.

'Bloo'y 'skimo.'

'You goddambloody Austrarlien,' he retorts. 'Oh, boog——!'

There is sudden uproar on deck. Above the echoing quiet comes a stabbing fusilade of loud explosions, followed by staccato reports. With these are mingled the surprised shouts of men.

The pigs leap up with startled squeals and career erratically towards the foredeck, one of them engaging in an accidental but thoroughly successful disputation with the carpenter's legs *en route*. The captain and mates rush along to arrest the murderer. Marty, Svenny, and Einar spring wildly for the lifeline. And then, rearing like a viciously spurred warhorse with the surprised Frenchman in the saddle, a decrepit motor cycle comes charging down the deck at me. Just in the nick of time I bat to the lifeline. The thing whirls past to the quarterdeck, circumnavigates the hatch by a miracle, and goes wildly along the other side of the ship, with the Frog grimly glued to the seat. Gosta and I rush to the other side in time to see him off at the main capstan. The whole ship has stopped what it was doing, and is now watching proceedings. But the Frog is satisfied. He has been trying for nearly a week to get it started, and can now go straight ahead with his tinkering. He brings it back to the maindeck, and hoists it by means of ropes stretched from the shrouds. Gosta and I amble up. The Frog unscrews a spark-plug and begins to clean it. There is the light of triumph in his eye.

'By Jes' Chris', he says, as we come up. 'I t'ought we were going out-side.'

'Just what I thought I was going to do when you came along,' I complain.

'But I ride 'im well,' he boasts. 'It is easee to me. Mos' people zey want many time before zey are good enough to ride. But when I bought 'im, t' fellow say to me "do zis" and "do zat." It is easee. I do 'im all firs' time. I buy 'im an' ride 'im straight away wiz me.'

Gösta is examining the internals of the machine.

'Plentee dirtee,' he remarks, mimicking the Frog.

That worthy frowns slightly, but loftily ignores the criticism. Gösta mooches off to the *kabyss* and returns a few moments later with Ek at his side. Together they examine the machine.

'*Paleon* dirtee,' agrees Ek.

'By Chris'. Dirtee, dirtee, dirtee! Is it? You go to 'ell,' shouts the Frog.

Silently, mischievously, they watch him for awhile.

'*Very* plenty dirty,' challenges Gösta.

The Frog makes a lunge at him, but Gösta deftly evades him, and stands at a distance with his tongue poked out.

*Batard! Va te faire un pompier!* The Frog returns to his operations on the plug, and does not notice Ek until the front tyre is suddenly deflated with a gasping hiss. Ek clammers up the shrouds with the Frog in hot pursuit. Meanwhile Gösta is busy with the valve of the rear tyre. The Frog, shouting and cursing and gesticulating, livid with

rage, slithers down again and stands guard balefully over his treasure. Gösta retires, and after a string of abuse, the Frog once more starts to clean. Ek remains in the shrouds for fully ten minutes until he is sure he is forgotten. Then he stealthily descends until within knife reach of the supporting ropes. Gently and painstakingly he saws the ropes, leaving a few strands to each. Then he ascends to the mainyard, crawls along, and comes down the other side. Within five minutes the machine crashes to the deck. . . .

\* \* \*

There is excitement in the f'c'sle. The first copy of the ship's newspaper, compiled in vivid Swedish, is on view in Bertil's cabin. There are a dozen type-written copies and these are being auctioned by Bertil and Erik, they being the joint editors and sole proprietors, as well as chief contributors. This unique journal is styled *The Barometer*, and is notable for its cock-eyed policy and Rabelaisian wit. It is described as official organ for Russell and neighbourhood.

On the leader page is an introduction by the editor-in-chief:

'Man does not exist on salt-petred viands alone: he must have food also for the soul, and with this number we have confronted ourselves with that task – to supply the spiritual side of the household's grub. And, having gathered about

us a very fine staff of journalists, we can guarantee that our offering will not be after the prescription of the steward, who cooks his soup upon a nail.

‘From all our world the news will come – from wheelhouse to closet, and from peak to topmast. Developments and trade inventions, points on the art of starving, together with 1001 ways to whip a buntline, will all be thrashed out by eminent authorities. Prominence will be given to social matters, and on the workhouse rations we shall direct the eye of Argus. Our motto shall be, “Give the Lord what belongs to Him, and to all men what is rightly theirs.”

‘We hereby recommend ourselves to your most gracious judgment.

‘(P.S. At the moment of going to press, evil tongues tell us that we have made us a speaking tube for the Bolsheviks. This is dam’ rot.)’

Then follows the itemised news page, compiled from the ‘News from all Sources.’

‘*Community*.—The state of health in our community during the past few weeks has been extraordinarily bad. The symptoms would seem to indicate lack of lubrication following the last hurricane.’

‘*Health Works Department*.—The inspector reports there is very little moving, and that so far nothing has been done. The staff, however, is exerting every effort in preparation for the great

campaign, to be launched when the hotter weather comes.'

*'Prohibition.*—According to rumour the Spirit Company has gone bankrupt, and the managing director has been discharged. He is said to have made a strenuous appeal by blowing the larboard watch a schnapps, but it is said they will have none of him. There is no confirmation of this report.'

*'Trades and Labour.*—The Apprentices' Schools have been closed down and entirely out of function since the last trade wind, several months ago. It is reported one of the teachers found a pack of cards in his cupboard.'

Then follow wirelessly reports:

*'Sensation For'ard.*—To-day in the sunset, news spread like wildfire that the cleaners had declared their strike off. Soon the foredeck was thronged by a writhing mass of people all anxious to hear the latest reports. When our correspondent at last forced his way through the rumour was found to be without foundation.'

*'Carpenter Ill.*—We learn from The Rudder Correspondent that last night the Carpenter arrived on time at the mustering.'

*'New Record.*—From the same source it is reported that Koleh Mita, while wearing clogs in last night's brace-rope tug-o'-war competition, fell on his buttocks fifteen times in three minutes. This is a new Finnish record.'



Under 'Musick and Literature' is the following:

'The by-gone week has offered several grand whistling concerts. In Russell at the present time are three accomplished soloists. By far the cleverest, however, is Herr Andrastyrman, a shrilling virtuoso who has no peer – thank Almighty Heaven – and to hear his sweet *pianissimo*, Policeman-o-policeman-o, is a real joy. There is a striking contrast in his moving *rondo*, All Hands, from the tragic opera of that name.'

The most striking feature in the issue, however, is

THE STORM  
A Tragi-Comedy  
in  
One Unnerving Tableau  
with  
Incidental Music  
by  
M. Gentilo Zephyro

*The scene is a four-masted royal-rigged bathtub, destined for Europe, but now on drift towards the South Pole. Centre is the aft hatch and Right the poop deck. All is calm and bright. Sitting astride the head compass, spitting violently, is the CAPTAIN. Close by is the CHIEF MATE, sucking lozenges. The CAPTAIN is listening in to a speaking-tube.*

*Captain.* What! Two hurricanes and a tornado! Crickey! (*Turns excitedly to CHIEF MATE*). Set every

goddam thing that pulls. I will bloodywell sail all night. The Steward has just been dusting the barometer. It's fallen again.

*Chief Mate (Aside).* That swine'd drop anything. (*To CAPTAIN*) Oh yes, Captain. Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Hadn't we better be sparing, though? Hadn't we, though? Eh, Captain? Eh, eh, eh, eh?

*Captain.* What! Are you talking bulsh to me again!

*Enter WHIPPETS CHIEF garbed as a Third Mate. He is a plump, clumsy wretch, and is weeping.*

*Whippets Chief.* Oh-h-h-h! Xzcyslupskar! Oh-h-h-h!

*Captain.* What's the matter with you, you snivelling prawn?

*Whippets Chief.* Oh, Chief, what shall I do now! All the buntlines are whipped twice over. Oh, Captain dear, what shall I do now?

*Captain.* Set all sails. Set everything that pulls! (*Snatches CHIEF MATE's whistle, and blows like blazes*).

*Sounds of voices and approaching footsteps are heard.*

*Voices.* Kyss me, kyss me. Yo-heave-ho.

*Captain.* All right, all right, keep your pants on. Everything that pulls. Up and loosen the royals, jibs, gaff tops'l, spanker and jigger stays'ls, overhaul. Loosen, get away from the yard, and overhaul!

WHIPPETS CHIEF *utters a whoop of joy, crashes down stairs, and disappears inside under poop deck. He re-enters a moment later, bearing in his arms a huge bundle of whipping twine. He flings this wildly down on quarterdeck, Left.*

*Whippets Chief.* Here you are. Twine! ! Overhaul, overhaul, overhaul, overhaul, overhaul! ! !

*There is a silence of half an hour. The officers dodge about the poop deck, tugging violently at everything that looks like rope.*

*Voice (from somewhere above).* Hey! On deck! Clear to stretch the sail. (Again CAPTAIN *blows whistle violently*).

*Captain.* Haul like hell. Stretch the royal. Haul away.

*Sounds of terrific hauling, to the tune of the Volga Boatmen, with the following words in strange throaty voices:*

*Voices:*

Here is milked

Here is hauled

*Haista vittu, haista vit*

Here is milked

Here is hauled

*Haista vittu, haista vit*

There is Bjöckas playing banquet

Tighting the leeches down in the peak

Up goes the pin

Down goes the Finn  
And whoosh comes the yard  
*Haista vit!*

*As the song ends, there is a terrific crash, and the royal yard comes thundering down on deck.*

*Captain (weeping).* Strength and unity.  
*Whippets Chief.* And it came from above.

*Captain.* Who cares a curse? We've got plenty more royals. Up and tell the carpenter to chip a new royal-yard.

*Chief Mate.* But Captain, Captain, Captain! We must be sparing, sparing. Eh, don't you think, Captain? Eh, eh, eh, eh, eh?

*Captain.* Out with the flying jib. Hi! (*Turning round*) Helmsman, let the wheel be, let it steer its goddam self. Up and out with the flying jib. (*To CHIEF MATE*) Call up the free watch. They've slept long enough. Take up all the old shirts aboard and set them for the breeze out on the yard-arms. Set every goddam thing that pulls!

*There are thudding sounds from the foredeck. After that silence, while the CAPTAIN, still spitting violently, waits for the storm that fails to come. Later, the STEWARD enters, bearing a bed-bug between thumb and forefinger. He hands it dramatically to CAPTAIN.*

*Captain.* Who's is this? It looks familiar.

*Steward.* Yours, sir. It must have escaped from your room. I was dusting the barometer and

found him in the back, poor little chap. He had a smile of contentment on his face, but dead! Ah, dead, poor little chap!

*Captain.* Ah, misery! And to think that while he was dying I believed that story about a drop. Oh, you miserable snobbedob, get out! (*Catches up STEWARD and flings him overboard*).

*Distant Voices.* Qwmroyiufkapskar!

*Captain* (*To CHIEF MATE*). Take all sails. Take every goddam thing that pulls. (*Aside*) Ah, misery!

*CAPTAIN breaks down. Others go off stage. CAPTAIN takes a German cigarette from his pocket and, sitting on the head compass, dejectedly lights his fag. There is a shattering explosion and a blinding flash, which obscures the CAPTAIN. When the smoke clears the ship is sinking and the masts and yards and gear are crashing about the head of the CAPTAIN who sits, with blackened face and spitting violently, astride the head compass. Finally only the head compass remains above water. The CAPTAIN stares straight ahead of him. He slowly sinks out of view, and between spits he shouts, 'Set every goddam thing that pulls!'*

*(Quick Curtain).*



## C H A P T E R   V I I I

THESE are harassing times. The south-east trade is a miserable breeze, full of strange tricks and variations, which keep us forever at the braces. First one side and then the other, tacking on close-haul, squaring up, and back to close-haul. In addition we have averaged about two rain-squalls every day for the past week. Seldom can we discover 180 degrees of horizon. Always some part is obscured by rain. By day we cannot sleep, owing to the heat and the clanging of hammers on rusty iron or knives and scrapers on the teak.

When the port watch opened the skylight of our *skans* and began to scrape the teak, dropping a shower of shavings on me and my bunk, I protested vigorously.

‘Only speak to the chief an’ he will stop it,’ advised Pittson.

I did so. That gentleman allowed it was too bad and that sleep was out of the question. But it was a mere trifle to what I would hear when they began chipping the iron sides of the *skans*.

I retired in dudgeon to the *skans* and slammed the door, and before I was even dozing they began to scrape *that*. St. Peter, awakened from



pleasant slumber by the scratching of Lost Souls at his gate, could not have felt bitterer than I was at that moment. The noise disturbed Gösta. We both sat up in bed and shouted our curses at the unsympathetic wretches outside. We swore that when we came out on watch we would chip holes outside their bunks. They poked their heads inside the door and made rude noises at us. And the scraping continued.

Neither is there any rest at nights. Either we are making our own clamour with the ceaseless changing of the yards, or we are kept awake by the din of the other watch in the same pursuits. It is impossible for a light sleeper to doze through such a row. First there are two sharp whistles. Then voices, orders, clatter of clogs on the wooden deck. These are followed by the whirring of heavy ropes passing tightly through the wood blocks as the ponderous yards are brought about. Coils of rope bump down on the deck. Then the wire-rope sheets have to be hauled close by means of the capstan with its irregular, staccato clickety-click.

There is another aspect. The work and hardships and freedom are giving us the strength of giants, and there is no safety valve, no outlet, beyond more work, and this serves only to make us stronger. Nils is chaffing me about this.

‘You feel very strong now? – pulling many

ropes?' he asked, while we were at the side one night, waiting for the next brace to come up.

'Nils,' I said. 'When the first ship passes us, I think I shall jump outside and swim for it.'

'I know,' he grinned. 'You very strong. I am it, too. It make me a'ake at night – so strong.'

Sometimes at night I lie awake in my bunk, without any covering on my body, waiting for the next watch to begin – too bored to read, too tired to write, and too hot to sleep. One of my chief amusements then is to place the dim lamp on the table opposite, and fashion shadow animals on the wall with my hands. I have fashioned everything from an angry cockatoo to a yawning alligator. Sometimes there is a comfortable couch under the stars, among the sails left overnight on the hatches ready for bending the next day. We sleep in fitful dozes snatched at odd hours through the days and nights.

The captain is complaining bitterly about the wind. He says it isn't a south-east trade wind at all. We are about two and a half degrees below the Line, and the wind is becoming weaker and weaker. Even at its best it forces us into close-haul. We have to steer by the wind. Standing at the wheel for an hour under these conditions is too dull for description. The captain mooches and grumbles about the poop, or else just sits

on a bollard and stares vacantly down into the blue depths over which we so slowly pass. If the slightest gust of wind creeps along he jumps up, comes and stands in front of the steering compass, and watches the helmsman's efforts. When I am at the wheel the course is generally very erratic, and many a gibe of biting sarcasm falls from his tight lips about my head.

Andrastyрман and I are again at variance. This time it was due to an incident which arose during the unbending of the fore upper top-gallant, the entire trouble being caused by a knife. Although thieving of the next man's property is ticketed in the f'c'sle as the unforgivable sin – a crime even more serious than whistling in an actress's dressing-room – my bowie knife has been stolen. This has placed me at a great disadvantage in the work. Of course, for defence purposes, I have something better in my cabin. But in the work the knife is indispensable. Almost every job one does calls for the use of a sharp blade. The Frog instances that 'a sailor without a knife is like a woman without a tongue.' I have mentioned my loss to Andrastyрман, but all he can say, like a parrot, is 'Vell, den, you must get one anot'er.' Heedless of my protests, he sent me aloft with the others to unbend the t'gn'sl. To unbend a sail means to cut it down from the yard. The knife, of course, is

absolutely necessary for this. It was quite plain from the deck that I was doing nothing aloft, and Andrastyрман shouted up at me:

‘V’y are not you vorking?’

‘Haven’t got a knife as I told you,’ I shouted back.

‘Haven’t got a knife! V’y you haven’t got a knife? *Satan!* You are useless up dere. Come down here,’ he yelled.

I clambered down, spoke much of my mind to him, and told him that if I did happen to find a knife I’d impale him on it. I was thereupon ordered to clean out the pigs’ pen. We are no longer friends.

It has since become my duty to take the first wheel in each of the day watches. When I have stood there for one hour, Andrastyрман comes up to tell me I am standing for another. I am standing for anything up to five hours each day at the wheel. The skipper wants to know why. I feign ignorance, and tell him to ask the mate. He evidently understands, and doesn’t bother to inquire any farther.

The Frog is in disfavour in all quarters. The captain has not forgotten the complaint about the food. The Frog doesn’t seem to mind much. He resigns himself to the circumstances, with an attitude of carelessness.

‘I tak’ it easee,’ he tells me, as we meet each

other sneaking to the f'c'sle for a peaceful smoke. 'Ev'rybodee else tak' it easee, an' so I tak' it easee also. Capitaine 'e know it. 'E don' tell me "good morning" no more.'

And it suddenly occurs to me that he is right. A chain of little incidents that have puzzled me now links itself together. I go straight to Nils to question him.

'Yes,' he drawls. 'We all take it easy.'

'Well, you're a lot of miserable bloody twirps not telling me.' I feel highly annoyed, and go off to tip London the wink. He, too, has not been told, although the rebellion extends to the port watch. Together we interview Erik. He apologises, but London tells him to take his apologies to a place that is forbidden.

\* \* \*

Before nightfall the wind has exhausted itself, and the ship stands idle. Our luck is out, and we are caught in the doldrums. The captain and mates are fed up and, with the exception of Andrastyrman, are playing poker in the mess-room. Between six and seven o'clock the sky takes on a curious demeanour. Clouds are all around us, as though we are hemmed in. They are all colours of the rainbow, from soft greys and pinks to a deep menacing puce. Erik suggests there is a terrific storm somewhere. Just before the changing of the watch there are excited

shouts from the deck. Gösta and I leave our food and go out, to find ourselves gazing on the insidious beauty of a huge waterspout about a mile and a half ahead. It moves round rapidly to port and is a bare half-mile from our side. We watch, fascinated. If we ran foul of that we would stand little chance of getting through. For nearly fifteen minutes the whirling stream of water ascends to a low black cloud before we lose sight of it in the swift-fading light.

We take over the watch, pull the braces tight, and return to our bunk. Bertil and Erik and Pittson are eating, and Pittson proudly exhibits a bottle of whisky. He has claimed a birthday, and persuaded the bottle from the skipper. Pittson and Erik are half drunk already. It takes very little liquor to go to a man's head up here, when he is in glowing unclouded health and fitness, and has had no drink for sixty days.

Gösta and I join the festivities, and the mugful of straight whisky puts us in careless mood. Two other favoured ones join us, and we blend our voices in vulgar song. Nils comes to investigate a rumour he has heard, and soon he is swaggering and as fractious as the rest of us. We confide in each other how little we care for the law and order of the ship. To hell with them! We plot to carry out a sweeping mutiny and run the ship back to Rio where we can hit the high spots.



We shan't kill the captain outright – merely put him in irons down the coal peak. We plan an elaborate scheme by which the steward will be left tied to a raft with a piece of his salt meat suspended twelve stinking inches above his nose, and his head firmly imbedded in a dish of sloppy *lapskois* of his own mixing.

Two whistles interrupt our scheming.

Nils sways out and demands what the bloody hell is wrong now. He has a sharp cross-fire shouting match with Andrastyrman. What? Squall coming? To blazes with the squall! We go along to the maindeck, however, and stand by. Rain suddenly pelts down, and we retreat to the main *skans*. Two whistles blow and nobody responds. Two more and nothing happens. Two more. Still nothing. Andrastyrman comes to the main *skans*. Nils challenges his parentage and refers him to hell. Andrastyrman moves towards him. We line up around our champion, and the mate thinks better of it and departs.

'What was the whistle for?' asks London from his bunk.

'Jus' rain, so we could get wet,' the Frog tells him. 'Zat *bâtard*, 'e frighten of rain. 'E t'ink storm come. We mus' stan' by. Always like zat in Tropics. One minute moon, and next minute rain. It is ver' deep an' soft down b'low.'

The squall soon passes and we return to our

*skans*. There is a drop of whisky left for Nils, Gösta, and me. We smoke and talk. Our mood is less fractious, but still antagonistic. Nils suggests a deputation to the captain on the morrow to complain about the food. The idea catches our imagination and we lay plans.

\* \* \*

After another glaring day of doldrums we are rewarded with a dish of blah, in which porridge and rice and mouldy carrots play important parts. It puts us in the mood we want. The deputation follows immediately on the changing of the watch. The captain is on the poop. Nils is spokesman. He addresses the poop in Swedish.

‘We would speak with the captain.’

The skipper comes to the railing and waits, smoking a cigarette. Nils wastes no words.

‘Do you think this is enough for a man’s stomach after a hard day’s work?’ he shouts, brandishing a bilious-looking exhibit.

‘Yes,’ replies the Old Man promptly.

‘Well, we don’t,’ retorts Nils.

The skipper shows some interest.

‘What are you going to do about it, then?’

‘We go hungry. No man can eat this,’ Nils snorts.

‘Well?’

‘And the salt meat stinks from here to hell,’ pursues Nils, warming to his subject, although rather baffled by the skipper’s attitude.

‘That’s a goddam lie!’ shouts the captain.

‘Is it a goddam lie?’ Nils turns to the crew.

‘*Nez!*’ roars Erik, none the less enthusiastically for his not having been invited to do so. We had rehearsed this part differently.

‘We cannot work all day with this,’ Nils exclaims.

‘You bloodywell will work with it. Anybody who wants to argue about that can come up here. The skipper adopts a bellicose attitude. ‘I am taking full responsibility for the food you get. *Ga ur min asyn!*’

We do as bidden, and go out of his sight. There is nothing else to do. The skipper is a big powerful man, with forearms that bulge and ripple with brawny muscle. Nobody quite feels like going up to the poop to carry on the argument with him. But although we are cowed our discontent is undiminished. There is good reason for our complaint. The dish objected to actually is a mixture of the morning’s left-over porridge, the rice that remained from lunch, a few tasteless potatoes and carrots, and several enigmas. The taste is standardised by the addition of three times too much sugar. The Scandinavians have a sweet tooth, but none of the men on our ship,

rough as they are, disguise their hostility to the infamous dish of blah.

It is no idle talk that the food is bad. Apart from the bread, margarine, and coffee, there is nothing that really justifies ordinary wear and tear on our jaws. London and I have threatened the steward until he allows us to go to the *kabyss* and toast our bread on the hot oven face. Apart from the scattered nibblings, I am holding body and soul together solely on toast and coffee – four thick slices of burnt bread each meal. The meat I simply cannot eat. Acute hunger has forced me to try, but it has only resulted in those painful, horrible little salt meat boils. The fish is tasteless and safe, but stinks so strongly of ammonia that it gives me no appetite whatever. Sometimes we have pancakes which are tasty but not very sustaining. At lunch each day I fortify myself a little with two potatoes mashed with my margarine. But this is a strain on the margarine. The steward still refuses to give us more than the allotted weekly rations of margarine and sugar. With sugar for the pancakes, and toast every meal, it takes as much as I can do to carry on. Useless to plead hunger to the steward. ‘I ain’t got it’ is his only reply. I long for a plain stew and jam. We never get stew, and have had jam twice – a spoonful for each man to go with his Easter pancakes away back in the Roaring

Forties. Although only in his early twenties, this fat Finnish steward is a big fellow with a pig of a temper. He sees the point of an argument only when it is demonstrated with the aid of a capstan-bar or a rope with a heavy wood block tied to the end of it.

There is the case of the Frog and the bonneater. We are in the land of the flying fish, and there is great sport to be had in fishing from the outer end of the jib-boom. The bait is a piece of white rag firmly strung on a hook. This is dangled about an inch above the water as the ship is moving. The bonneater, a big tasty fish whose main pursuit in life is flying fish will follow the rag for miles snapping at it. Bonneater are very hard to hook, but the big fellows are worth the trouble. The Frog has had a good deal of experience at the game. He caught the first soon after we entered the south-east trade. Exultantly, with eyes and belly big in anticipation, he prepared the fish and marched it to the *kabyss*, and politely requested the use of a cooking-dish, a piece of lard, and a corner of the oven. To his utter amazement the steward refused to supply them. The Frog stared for a moment, and then went temporarily insane. He seized a capstan-bar, half-stunned the steward, and went about cooking his fish, which he unselfishly divided between himself, London, and

me. The steward treats the Frog more respectfully these days.

\* \* \*

There is one good feature about a tropical rainstorm – it affords a pleasing bath for the free watch. The tepid rain pelts down heavily for the few minutes that it lasts, and makes a fine shower-bath. Whenever it approaches the cry goes up ‘Squa-a-a-al’ and there is a rush for it. If the squalls occur frequently, the men on watch take no notice when they are working. They don’t mind getting wet. A few of the fellows seem bashful about uncovering themselves, but the majority go about all day clad only in trousers. If these get wet, the heat of the atmosphere or the sun will soon dry them.

To-day, however, is Sunday – a free day – and we are all in the fun. A thick rain squall is out to starboard and coming up. Fifteen men in stark nakedness stand about the deck, soap in hand, and with socks and shirts and underwear spread before them, waiting for the water. Two and a half minutes later we are in the thick of it, industriously scrubbing our clothes and our bodies. Einar is kneeling under the drain which takes the water from the roof of our *skans* to the deck. There is a good stream of water here, and as he wants to wash all his socks this squall, he has sought and found the best place to do it. From



where he washes, a stream of soapy water runs across the deck to the guttering beneath the bulwarks. Gösta has been asleep, but now, awakened by our shouts, he comes running around the corner of the *skans* towards the fore-deck, with a cake of soap in his hand. He does not notice the slippery stream across the deck from Einar's wash until one of his feet steps on it and slithers away in front of him. We roar with laughter as he is forcibly seated on the deck. He has impetus from his running, his behind discovers the soap, and away he shoots backwards along the deck. His language is appalling, but he enjoys a much needed bath. The man on police duty is left out of it, but we are glad this is so, for the chief mate orders him to set buckets at all the pipes and to tip the contents into our water tanks.



## C H A P T E R   I X

INSIDIOUS damned Tropics!

When I have left this ship and have purged my body and soul of the filth in which they are steeped, there shall stand out in my memory all the wonders that lie beyond us and the ship, and then I shall fall upon my knees and laud and magnify immortal almighty Nature who, alone of all the artists, is capable of transmuting this hideous existence into colourful, unforgettable life. Only Nature, with single fanfare, could lift the heart and mind of man above these sordid surroundings and transport him – as it momentarily transports me – in trailing clouds of glory to that strange world whence he came.

This morning – in that memory I shall treasure it above all others – Gösta and I drank coffee at half-past-five, and went out on the quarterdeck to smoke and await the sound of two bells which summoned us to labour. At first there were grey clouds in the eastern heavens broken here and there by patches of that striking grey-green which presages the dawn. I squatted lazily on the canvas-covered hatch and watched day unfold itself as a perfect symphony, vivid yet tranquil,

and in sheer harmony. It ascended through a beautiful *andante* movement that whispered of the Sun God's sleep, broke startlingly into The Awakening, swelled to full orchestral grandeur with a crimson flourish marking the advent of Dawn, and the Sun God rode up over a brilliant path of streaming gold. The whole world bowed and blushed at his entrance as he paused on the horizon. Around the edge of every cloud – east, west, north, and south – warm pink tips appeared like soft filmy fringes of dainty feminine undergarments peeping naughtily about the more austere frock. There was but a fleeting glimpse, as though the sky, noticing the disarrangement, hastily tucked in the offending pieces. At this point the Sun God reared himself from the water, dripping gold. Heaven's trumpeters flashed a pulsating passage of brilliant sunshine, and it was day.

That is how dawn came up before me, lost in wonder and silent applause, when across the lingering melody, in blatant discord, crashed the sound of four tinny bells. My halcyon morn became at once the beginning of the hottest day we have had – a perfect swelterer.

This is why I curse these insidious Tropics.

We still stand idle, with never a breeze to flick us onward. For four days we have been thus. There is movement, of course, but only in

the current. If we remain in this belt without wind, the equatorial current will eventually bear us to the north-east trade wind, but it might be days – weeks – months! Men have starved and thirsted, and ships have rotted and fallen apart, in these same tropical degrees. And in the meantime, for all the impetus we gain from the current, to us there is no apparent sign of motion. This heavily burdens the minds of those of us who would have done with it and come home into port. Were it not that our safety would be prejudiced, London and I would cheerfully get out now and walk to England.

Surely there can be nothing more sickening than to finish one day's hot and heavy work and retire to bed, to awake the next hot morning to the knowledge that no progress has been made and that all the past day's efforts have gone in vain and must now be repeated. I have paraphrased Savoy:

‘Oh to be wafted away  
From these hot sweating doldrums of horror  
Where the dirt of a working to-day  
Is the work of a dirty to-morrow.’

It is the greatest curse of the doldrums. I know of no condition of life more vacant and unproductive than doldrums. It seems like struggling towards a mirage – the mirage of horizon – or forever setting back the clock.

Perhaps – if this canvas-covered hatch whereon I sit were instead a long awned deck sand-stoned to spotless white by Lascar hands; a deck with a spreading row of easy chairs containing clean and elegant people; a deck about which are heard the sounds of music and of gay laughter; a deck where never the note of a bell intrudes; a deck which idles in an atmosphere of luxury and independence – perhaps, then, my judgment might prove to be somewhat bigoted and hasty.

But it is not so. Here are four bells that ding damnably at me across a dirty deck; here my body knows nothing more elegant than a pair of unwashed, paint-spattered shorts; here I shall soon be required to muck about the pigs' pen; here is no music and gay laughter, but the sounds of knives scraping over teak, of chisel and hammer grating and thudding on rusty iron, of paint-brushes swishing, of recumbent swine snoring, and of greasy pots and pans making an unappetising clatter in the *kabyss*.

Andrastyрман comes to the poop railing, I flick my cigarette overboard, the rest of the watch straggles up yawning, and the inevitable orders come. To me:

‘You are taking de pigs.’

Up to the foredeck with broom and pails. I peep into the den of iniquity. Rotten bloody swine! Stink and filth, always the same in the

mornings. How people can eat bacon passeth all my understanding. I used to relish it once, but I doubt if ever I shall again. I prod the wretches viciously with the hard broom, and they waddle out of their cage snorting and messing. I begin by throwing a dozen pailfuls of salt water inside, and then starts the scrubbing. My feet and legs are soon like those of a puddle-duck. I can wash them afterwards in salt water though. Half-way through my job the skipper thinks he espies a puff of wind approaching from the sou'-west. As we are on sou'-east tack we must bring the yards about. This happens frequently. There might be a dozen puffs throughout the forenoon – not one of them strong enough to inflate a Christmas balloon – and we go through the round again – fore, main, and cross braces – hauling, heaving, sweating, swearing, panting – so that somehow the ship can drift, gibe, rear, crab-walk, or push its way through the doldrums.

‘Aho – aha – ahe!’ yodels Nils, and we tug at the braces in unison. He looks up at the flopping sails as they come round. Not a breath of air in them. He blows with his mouth at them, grins, and shouts again:

‘Aho – plenty vind – bimebye – round she comes – round again – back to Melbourne – back to Little Lon – seven-and-six – strong boys – ten bob stripped——’



He laughs at his own vulgarity and pauses for breath. One cannot keep up the shouting for long when pulling like this. The Frog takes up the rhythmical shouting:

‘Aho – aha – Jes’ Chris’ – ahe – salt meat – plenty wind – bimebye – *va te baiser – la queue——*’

By the time we have finished this it is six bells and my wheel turn. This means nothing beyond just standing, but it is better than the pigs’ pen, and thankfully I go to it. Svenny is at the wheel, good old lanky, splay-footed Svenny, who is the tallest man aboard. Heaven alone has the doubtful privilege of knowing why he came to sea; Svenny himself doesn’t know what object he had in view. Whatever it was he will never achieve it. For one thing his eyes are against him – they ogle too much. Then again there are his knees, which knock loudly whenever he walks. In addition, he has more than a man’s fair share of feet. Disguised as rubber-boots, these might pass in a large crowd. But now, in solitary spreading uncoveredness, they are more than a mere blot on the landscape. They diffuse in bunioned unloveliness. I have told Svenny that for economic, social, and personal reasons, he would be well advised to keep them always hidden, but he only smiled at me. His smile is Svenny’s chief charm. He wanders as in a beautiful dream, and merely smiles when addressed. Nothing ever seems to

dismay, offend, or transcend him. His emotions, I feel sure, would be the same during a moment of sublime passion as they are when he is eating *lapskois*.

He delivers the wheel into my hands.

'Be de vind,' says Svenny, ignoring the fact that there hasn't been any in sight for days.

'Be de vind,' I echo, and then settle myself in a comfortable lean against the comatose wheel.

And to the captain, as Svenny departs:

'Be de vind.'

He gets no reply. The Old Man is sitting on his favourite bollard, gazing at a shark. Presently he turns to me, 'You'd better keep her about nort'-east,' – and adds – 'if you can.'

'Right.'

He gazes up at the sails which hang listlessly on the creaking yards:

'Bastard! Didn't I tell you it was summer!'

He turns to me:

'You'll be able to write a whole bookshelf before de trip is finished.'

'As bad as that, captain?'

'Oh, it's——' he breaks off, stumped for expression. Ten leaden silent minutes pass, and the skipper yawns and lights a cigarette. 'I don't care now,' he says. 'De passage is spoilt. Dam' de luck. Fancy losing de sout'-east trade just as it used to be de strongest. Ve had a good chance

before, but now it should be about a hundred-and-twenty days, I t'ink.'

'I'll bet you an even whisky-and-soda in Queenstown we don't. We won't go over fifteen sailing weeks,' I say. 'I feel it in my bones. London is busy praying for wind, and so am I. And I've got my lucky charm pinned over my bunk, and it won't fail me. It never does.'

'*Vad* is your lucky charm?' he asks, without enthusiasm.

'Picture of a girl I used to be in love with.'

'Good God! Den you better pull de bitch down. She's taking all de vind out of our sails.'

'De bitch has a habit of doing that,' I tell him.

He laughs and goes down to his breakfast.

As I go down after my wheel turn, I meet Pittson, grinning from ear to ear.

'Have de kapten tell your yob to you to-morrow?' he asks.

'What job's that?'

'You are to go on de foremast to keep look-out for de Line,' he chuckles.

The whiskered witticism does not improve the taste of my dishful of heavy porridge which constitutes to-day's breakfast, and which sends me scooting for'ard with *Rob Roy* under my arm as soon as I have eaten it.

\* \* \*

This is a lucky day for the starboard watch. It

is Saturday, and as we get the statutory half-holiday and our turn it is for the afternoon watch, we have an easy time of it. It means ammoniated fish for lunch, followed by rice, and a swig of cold coffee if we're lucky. There will be a hasty spring cleaning in our *skans*, a good body wash for ourselves, and then a loaf on the sunny f'c'sle.

It is now nine o'clock in the morning, and Gösta, Einar, and I are already up for'ard taking advantage of the sun. The two boys are endeavouring to catch a shark, while I am lying fully-stretched in naked drowsiness on the deck. I systematically sun-bathed throughout the trade wind days so that now my entire body is a walnut brown, my skin is accustomed to sun, and with impunity I can bare my whole body before an intensity of one-hundred-and-twelve degrees in the shade. This was the reading of our thermometer yesterday. But then, being an Australian, I am accustomed to heat and sun-bathing. The Scandinavians and Finns stare in amazement at me as I come out without a stitch of clothing and lie on the hot deck. The carpenter foolishly followed my example the first day of these doldrums, and his body became a mass of ghastly sun-blisters within an hour. The chief mate illicitly photographed me in the upside-down altogether yesterday morning. He says the picture

is worth £10 to him. Bertil and Erik are the only others who trust their trousers off in the sun. My favourite position is a comfortable seat on the outer end of the jib-boom. It is great fun sitting out there at the extreme point of the ship – something like the feeling of a boy riding on the front of an engine – with nothing but the horizon before me and never a soul to quibble at my undress. The reason I choose this position is that here the sun is never obscured by the sails, and I can enjoy the warmth to the full. Also it has this advantage, that the thick fore-royal stay which fastens two feet behind the tip of the outer jib-boom, makes a fine backrest. One can read here almost as in an arm-chair, except that after about half an hour's sitting in one position, the perch becomes rather hard.

Gösta and Einar are having fine sport. The shark is a big fellow of about six feet. It is fascinating to watch the easy way he swims. He treads water a dozen feet from the bait and then makes a sudden vicious dart at it. The white belly gleams, but that is as far as he ever gets. The explanation is simple. The damned fools have a hunk of the steward's salt meat as bait. Naturally no shark in his right senses would try to stomach that.

London is also on the f'c'sle, although he, being on the port watch, is at work. He squats on the

deck with his legs thrown out ahead of him, dispensing negligible effort on the scraping of the teak beading around the edges of the f'c'sle deck. He finds innumerable excuses – as do all of us when scraping – to pause in his work. Either his nose wants blowing, or he gets an itch somewhere and has to scratch it, or something down in the deep blue water catches his attention, or his knife needs sharpening and he goes down the steps to the grindstone on the foredeck. If the mate comes up to see what he is doing, he scrapes like blazes, doing a foot where previously he had done an inch. After the mate has gone London continues to scrape like blazes for another ten minutes and gets through about four feet, after which, having plenty of result in hand, he can afford to loaf again. London and I spend much of our time together warbling snatches from the Savoy operas, of which we have a mutual and fairly extensive knowledge. It pleases us, at certain intervals, to carol the *H.M.S. Pinafore* chorus, 'For he is an Englishman.'

I spend half my time whistling, and it is amusing to watch the effect on the different fellows. Andrastyrman has unsuccessfully pleaded with me to 'put de v'istle in de pocket.' Out of all my repertoire, ranging from jazz to Wagner, Nils sits fascinated while I whistle or sing Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B.'s ditty about how he became the



ruler of the Queen's Navee. More than that, he was not satisfied until I had taken a sheet of paper, ruled it up into *e*, *g*, *b*, *d*, *f* lines, and laboriously written down the notes of the song, together with odd pieces of harmony, so that he might remember and play it on his piano when he goes home to Sweden.

Gösta, on the other hand, insisted that I teach him a Sophie Tucker piece, and now he sings in a deep, harsh, cracked voice:

‘Dere’s somet’in’ Sparnishwin moyoyoyoyoyz,  
Hoo carn yaw say nez?  
Moy’cart’s ay volcanay  
Oy’ll sayit againay  
Oy lo-o-ove yaw.’

I climb in from the jib-boom to the f’c’sle, doing a spot of gymnastics on the guys *en route*. This is one of our favourite amusements. Nobody thinks of falling in and being nibbled by the sharks down below. By this time our hands are much too strong to fail us. We are rather like apes in the matter of swinging about in the rigging.

Einar, tired of trying to catch sharks, is now lying on the f’c’sle deck under the shade of the foresail. I stand nearby him, leaning against the starboard railing. He is fiddling with a length of rope, and presently conceives the idea of sitting up and lashing my legs together in a knot

that I should never be able, much less trouble, to undo. I wait until he has finished and then lean over his back to unsheathe his knife. I have half-drawn it when he swings his arm round and closes his fist against mine, pressing my fingers downwards hard against the keen blade. The pain stings and angers me and I swing my left hard against his jaw. It just misses the point, but evidently hurts him, for he snatches out the knife and turns it on me. There is no time to waste. He is angry and so am I. So I give him my left again to the jaw, making sure this time of the point, and he goes out to it. Gösta comes over with a grin at the incident, which he has watched from the outset. Einar revives and I ask Gösta to explain and apologise to him for me, at the same time exhibiting my bleeding fingers. Gösta evidently puts a good case, for with a grin Einar says 'Goot, very goot,' calls me a bastard, and returns his own apologies by way of Gösta. These fellows are terribly quick to take offence, and it doesn't do to play with them at all.

\* \* \*

In these doldrums we are finding more than ever the extreme boredom of our long isolation. After all, we are no more than high-spirited youngsters, and it is becoming increasingly difficult for us to grin and bear it. We are already the most unreasoning, unreasonable, childish,

selfish, ill-tempered, cantankerous, dirty, slovenly, greedy body of fellows anybody could wish to see assembled at once. Most of our resilience was washed away or frozen stiff away down south, and what little remains is steadily melting in the Tropics. More than ever the slightest incident assumes grave importance in our eyes. We see offence in everything, and many of us are on snarling terms.

The Frog accused Jack London of taking as long as he could to cut himself a slice of bread, thereby impeding the progress of the Frog's meal. They fought bitterly about it, until London made the Frog's nose bleed and half-stunned him with a thwack on the ear.

Yervy accused somebody of hiding a tin of condensed milk in his chest with intent to defraud the others. The accusation led to a brawl with knives until the others separated the duellists.

'The boys won't stand a thief,' Bertil told me when we were discussing it over coffee. 'Once, when I was in another ship, one of the boys stole another's money from his chest. The crew found him out and went to the Old Man and asked to be allowed to deal with him as they thought fit. The Old Man said they could, and so the boys tied him to a rope and threw him overboard and kept him there for half an hour. The water

was pretty cold, and the thief was half dead before they hauled him inside again.'

'Bawsted don't no steal more,' suggested Gösta, with his mouth full of stolen officers' biscuits.

After coffee we went out to fish for shark. There was a lively fellow playing about the bait slung over astern. The captain took a hand in the proceedings, and his experienced methods resulted in a quick capture. It always excites us when a shark is hooked, and there is a sharp tussle to get the rope for'ard and land the fish on the quarterdeck – the poop is much too dignified to be slopped upon by a dying shark. As soon as the big fish is aboard, somebody invariably introduces the cat. This cat now plays an important part in our daily affairs. The poor little wretch is made the butt of all the rough jokes. Every time any marine curio is discovered, it is brought along and presented to the cat. That animal's reactions to such curiosities are always a source of fun. He very nearly lost his head to the first shark hauled up. It was a five-footer, and lashed about and snapped viciously long after we landed him. Somebody brought the cat along and, being no exception to the curiosity rule, he proceeded to investigate. The shark's sharp teeth snapped together a fraction of a second after the cat had been standing there. Terrified, he scampered off and was halfway up

the shrouds in two seconds. This brought down the house and the laugh outlived the day.

All around the water is glassy still, and scattered over the surface are hundreds of those fascinating little purple chaps belonging to the jellyfish ilk and popularly known as Spanish Warships. They ride on the water, floating with the tide or propelled by the wind, and from the deck look like little balloons shaped like conch shells. But suspended from the innocent purple balloon, and dangling below the surface, are dozens of weedy purple feelers. These burn like hell when they are touched, and the sting remains for some time afterwards.

Some of us have never seen them before. Bertil brings one up in an improvised net. We gather round and make a close inspection and all must needs poke the balloon with our fingers to see if it will burst. London accidentally touches the feelers and goes off into a string of abuse when it begins to burn him. Whereupon the cat is brought along. The men stand back and wait, breaths bated and mouths grinning with cruel anticipation. The inevitable happens. Once again the unfortunate cat is forced to take refuge in the shrouds, feverishly endeavouring to paw the evil from its mouth. The marine wonder is then delivered to the pig, and the cruel comedy repeated.

It is incredible that grown men can be such cruel children.

\* \* \*

Mysterious night!

Rough music from the f'c'sle, the dark shapes of the masts describing circles, ellipses, figures of eight, be the ship ever so steady, among the flowers which sparkle brightly from the garden of heaven.

Tropical night in a sailing ship is a new and delicious world, for all the blowing of whistle, the blustering, the slave-driving. In such a night as this one can forget and forgive much. The night becomes such as the imagination makes of it. All the world is still save for the flashing of phosphorescence in the water, the twinkling of stars in heaven, and that gentle swaying of the masts. The commonplaces of the day are mere oblivion in such a night as this. Who could resist the glittering invitation of those million bright eyes that gaze down from their lofty stations in such friendly fashion? They are the most friendly things in all this friendless sea of warmth. I must go up aloft to commune with the stars and the night. I feel like the immortal Jack climbing up a huge beanstalk as I ascend, hand over hand – until I am sitting astride the royal yard – and gaze towards the Infinite. The stars seem 'mysteriously to draw near, one's soul



mysteriously to be projected into space, where mighty orbs whirl on magnificent journeys.'

Up here the rough music down below sounds softer, more kindly, as the boys warble their Swedish shanties to the accompaniment of Kolehns' accordion. I wish that I were not so alone here, that somebody whom I love were by my side, that we might gaze together over this field of brilliance. There is somebody who would tell me many beautiful things about the stars.

But I wish those stars would not wander. How on earth mariners ever manage to steer by them alone is beyond me – as are so many things connected with sailing. Despite the captain's complaints I have become fairly proficient in the art of keeping the compass-point on the right track, and I can keep fairly straight in steering by the wind – the most difficult, I think, of all steering – during the day. But steering at night without a compass is too much to expect of me. I may have a little imagination, and perhaps a *soupçon* of commonsense, but I am firmly convinced that I am, and shall be forever, devoid of sea-sense. If the course is north it is just as likely that I will take the ship south-west. It is like driving a car through Sussex by night. Out here there are no visible sign-posts, either – except the stars, and they all seem to twinkle alike before my inexperienced eyes. I try to find a

good bright one, and after a frantic search I discover him – Mars, for example – lurking behind the main lower top-gallant. Having discovered him, I sneak a furtive glance at the compass while the captain or the mate gazes the other way. When I have fixed a point in my mind I gaze up again, and – whoa! Where the devil's Mars got to? Oh, dammit, he's gone out on me. Now of all the——! Why, there's the brute out there, slinking across the sky away to port. Hi, come back here, blast you!

Just the bare five degrees off the course again.

\* \* \*

Bare to the waist and exhibiting lewd tattooings on every available part of his body, the Frog squats on the quarterdeck sewing a patch on a storm sail. It is the jib that was ripped down in the Westerlies. He is singing loudly and unmusically a snappy tune whose theme is a query, '*Elle a perdu son pantalons.*' I am washing the dishes of our *skans*, and trying to whistle him down. I don't like the timbre of his voice. Washing the dishes is a good easy job into which I have somehow fallen as part of my daily round. It means clearing the debris from two meals taken by five men. I always take an hour over this job. In the mornings I usually whistle over it. I can make no impression on the Frog to-day. He

continues to sing until it puts me off my dish stroke. I wander out and stand by him.

‘I don’t profess to know much of your blessed language, and far be it from me to argue with a Frenchman, but shouldn’t it be “*ses pantalons*”?’ I ask.

‘You whistle plentee?’ he counters.

‘Now don’t go and spring that damned B.C. pun on me,’ I warn.

‘You can whistle anywhere, yes?’

‘Yes. Why not?’

‘Zen go an’ whistle up – you know vere.’

‘Ah! I am not such a good contortionist. For you, it is easee. But for me, no-no. You are veree clevail, François,’ I retort, returning to my dishes. I whistle again, employing as many sharps, flats, trills, and *arpeggios* as might possibly put him off his beat. He changes from song and begins to whistle ‘*Si vous l’aviez compris.*’ We have a great contest for five minutes, at which stage Andrastyрман appears, and desires the Frog to put his whistle in his pocket.

The Frog looks viciously at him.

‘Is it? By Chris’, I can’t do not’in’ good on zis bloody ship.’

‘De sailor must no v’istle on de aft deck,’ says Andrastyрман.

‘Is it? You talk like ze bebe. Bimebye take all sails, yes? Too much bloody wind! *Que*

*tem cara de assassino bastardo!* Me pocket ain't beeg enough. You go away, see?'

And he looks so fierce about it that the mate obeys.

The Frog, I might add, has one extraordinary feature. Rough as he is, he will tolerate no cruelty to the cat when he is about. When he heard of the shark and Spanish Warship incidents, he went raving mad for fully five minutes, and threatened to kill us all. Heedless of the cat's careless habits, he takes it to bed with him when the weather is cold. He regularly feeds and fondles it. Personally, I wouldn't trust the fellow behind my back with a knife, but he is equally gentle where the cat is concerned. I have met men like that before – cruel and faithless in their dealings with human beings, but generous and kind to dumb animals.

The Frog's life has become a dog's life. For weeks he has been the butt of Andrastyrman's ill-temperedness, in the work of the ship. Andrastyrman is not a leader of men. Although he is himself a good sailor, and is more trusted by the captain in the supervision of sail-taking and similar work than the other mates, he completely loses his composure and sense of proportion in times of stress. If a high wind endangers a sail he becomes like a raving lunatic, and is apt to jeopardise the safety of lives in his anxiety to save

the sails and thus please the captain and the ship's owner. He rushes into the work with the crew and yanks and tears at ropes and canvas with the eager energy of a madman. He curses us if we do not go mad with him. If his unbalanced mind suspects any rebellion on the part of a man, he will single out that man to go aloft and make fast all sails that are taken, give him the most difficult and dirtiest jobs, and generally make his life a thing of hell and persecution. The Frog rebelled one night, and has suffered in consequence ever since.

There was a night down in the south-east trade during a terrific squall, when the Frog and I had to go up to the main royal and make it fast. The high wind made our task long and arduous, and as we had almost finished, one of the gaskets broke and our work had to be repeated. I thought the Frog would jump overboard in his rage.

'Rotten, rotten, rotten, bloody rotten! Everyt'in' on zis bloody ship rotten. *Christi Madonna!* If I had knife up 'ere, I would cut 'im all down – rope, sail, mast, yard, everyt'ing.'

\* \* \*

Svenny snores in his bunk with a temporary attack of sickness, alias tiredness. Another of the crew stands at the wheel in his place, and I am on police duty. I lie among the canvas on the hatch, waiting for three a.m. to be announced

by six bells from the wheelhouse. Time seems to hang dreadfully, although it is another gorgeous night with stars trembling over the entire sky. There is not a breath of air and all is dead quiet. All aboard are deep in slumber except the helmsman, the *utkik*, and me. Even Andrastyrman has succumbed to the tropical drowsiness, and is sunk deep in the officers' deck chair on the poop, snoring like a pig. Those infernal bells seem to be a long time coming. I am impatient to have done with my turn at the wheel so that I, too, may sleep. I wander into the *skans* to consult my watch about the matter. Good lor', it's well over time. Bells should have gone twenty-five minutes ago. Thinking the helmsman must be dreaming of St. Malo I steal up the poop steps, softly so as not to disturb Andrastyrman – for when he sleeps his whistle is dumb.

As I round the charthouse I see to my surprise that the wheel is deserted. Damned funny! I didn't see anybody leave the poop. To leave the wheel unattended is a crime supreme, and my suspicions are aroused. Tip-toeing across the deck, to my horror I see a dark form stealing slowly, softly, step by step towards the slumbering mate, with knife in hand, and poised. For a moment I watch the scene as one might a gripping melodrama. Then I spring for the wheel, hiss a name, and make a clamour with the bell.



The dark form slithers towards the jigger mast and stiffens into its ropes and shadows. The bells have disturbed Andrastyрман, who now comes across to the wheel and chats with me. I can hardly speak to him. My voice is dry and cracked and barely audible. I have never been up against cold-bloodedness like this before, and it has shaken me. Meanwhile the other has taken the opportunity to slide away unobserved to the f'c'sle. I will have to blackmail him after this for the sake of his unwashed neck.

\* \* \*

'Fo' bells!'

Oh gosh! Again that beastly howl. It is Erik this time. He is port policeman for the day. He stands now in our sleeping-chamber making sufficient noise to waken an army of dead men. I sit up with a yawn. Gösta is sitting up in his bunk, rubbing his eyes. The cat is asleep at his feet. Gösta sniffs and looks around.

'Plenty stink!' He crinkles his nose, then sniffs again. He makes a thorough investigation, and finally traces the source of his discomfiture. He looks at the sleeping animal intently, swears roundly and well at it, and administers the approved punishment for such an offence. He throws on a shirt and trousers and climbs down to sail into the meal that Erik has brought. The cat slinks to a corner pawing at its nose and

miaowing piteously. Gösta is not a hard-hearted kid. He throws it generous portions of his food, and upends the condensed milk tin for it. He finishes eating, stretches cavernously, and looks at me.

‘Have you some one zigarett paper?’ he asks.

‘Yes, Puka, and here’s some one tobac, too, you young devil. Why the blazes don’t you buy yourself some? You’ve been botting from me for a week.’

‘Stooard tell me I have no money more.’

‘But you said you had to bring two thousand marks aboard with you,’ I protest.

‘Stooard tell me I have used up it. Boogery, I have had only one t’ousan’ mark. But v’en I say dis to stooard he tell me I am bloody liar, and don’t no give me more zigaretten.’

‘The big twirp might’ve waited till you had spent three-quarters of it. Anyway, you can take zigaretten and paper when you want.’

‘*Kitos*,’ he says.

He rolls the spindly stuff together in a paper, slobbers all over the gumming, sticks it together, and puffs away like an old man.

‘Now I must take kyssy up and wash his nose,’ and he tucks the smelly cat under his arm, takes his face-towel, and proceeds for’ard.

Strange boy, Gösta! But lovable rather, although a pig at table. Not many youngsters

would think of washing a cat after they had deliberately punished it in the approved way. Some day I should like to write a great story about Gösta. He tells me that, on second thoughts, he is not so keen about 'dis ole shep,' and that he will run away on the next trip to Australia. I asked him if it were not rather tough on his father, who would be obliged to pay for the truancy. He told me scornfully that his father has plenty of money, and that if he objects to paying out in such a good cause, he can go and chase himself to the devil. Gösta went to sea because he was sent down from school as a result of a slight disputation with the headmaster. It would appear that by some mathematical trick common among schoolboys, Gösta had produced the figure 4 instead of the figure 8 as the *q.e.d.* of some rambling algebraic problem. This resulted, in Gösta's own words, in a 'goddam bloody plenty row.' Hot words were exchanged and strong, and Gosta finally let fall a verbal bomb-shell and made a triumphant exit. He is undoubtedly cut out for the sea. Far from being in the apprentice class, he knows a good deal more than most of the others, and is remarkably quick to learn. Even the Frog praises him.

We are now almost to the Line, and are in the region of big ships. This morning we saw our first sign of actual life outside the barque since

leaving Melbourne. This was a Swedish motor ship far out to starboard and travelling south at something like sixteen knots, as we could judge. She must have sighted our tail sails, but to our bitter disappointment, did not approach us or give any sign of recognition.

The skipper was secretly annoyed, I think, although he did not betray any outward sign. He is anxious to signal a message for a report to Lloyd's and to our owner, to let him know that we are safe and give him our position. Being without wireless, our only signals are by means of the flags. We were unable to give a report to Cape Pembroke as we passed the Falklands, and nobody in the world knows whether we are alive or dead. And from the churlish way we were treated by the passer-by this morning, it would seem that some people don't care. London is the bitterest of all.

It is dark now, and there are ship's lights to port. We carry but port and starboard illumination, and a small light astern, and it is evident we are not seen this time, although for fifteen minutes the third mate has been flashing a Morse signalling lamp from the poop. It improves the state of mind of the men, however, to know that other ships are out in this wide ocean.

We have caught a faint breeze from the north-east, and are moving slowly. Bertil, who has been

over this track before, thinks it might be the first breath of the north-east trade, but he is not<sup>g</sup> sure.

By noon next day – the sixty-seventh day out from Melbourne Heads – we have crossed the Line, and our position is a quarter-point north and twenty-five forty-six west. The breeze is freshening. Everybody is in great spirit, but the men are full of rebellion still. They consider themselves grossly insulted at the skipper's failure to provide a rum ration to celebrate the Crossing of the Line. London and I are not worried. All we desire is wind, wind, wind – and then more wind. Time enough to bother about the rum at Queenstown.

'It is – too soon,' says Nils. 'Dis 'ind, it is noti'ng. Bimebye calm again. Plenty time to Queenstown.'

'Inside another month, Nils,' I say.

'*Nez*. Two, t'ree mont's more.'

'Will you bet with me about it?'

'Yes.'

'How much?'

He thinks for a moment.

'Sixpence!'

'Done!' I tell him.

London offers to go stake-holder, but Nils turns him down.

'If I 'in – I pay. If he 'in – he pay.'

\* \* \*

‘Also dere are vairy beautiful *mezquita* which are being builded – also de Moors are building, in de twelef century——’

The speaker pauses for breath.

‘—— also dere are vairy beautiful pictures by Titian an’ Michaelangelo – also vairy plenty oder famous peoples——’

Another pause for breath.

‘—— also dey are saying de sword-blades de Romans are using in de days of Julius Kæsar are de finest in de world – also de monk in de *mezquita* are showing you de cup used by de Romans soldiers to catch de blood of Kristi after dey are putting him up on de cross——’

‘Just a minute, Erik,’ I interrupt. ‘I don’t quite follow there. Which one are you talking about now – Toledo or Cordova?’

Bertil is dangling his legs over his bunk and rocking with suppressed laughter behind Erik’s back.

‘—— also de monk of de *mezquita* are selling you a piece of vood from de cross of Kristi – also v’en you are coming outside you are looking at de piece of vood and underneat’ it are a label, ‘Made in Yapan’ – also ——’

‘Hey, Erik old man, just a min——’

‘—— also dey are saying——’

‘Bertil, for God’s sake do something here. I dunno whether I’m in Spain or Portugal or



China or Jerusalem. Listen Erik, was that last bit about Toledo or Cordova? I'm getting a bit mixed.'

'Eh?'

Erik, Bertil, and I are in their *skans* sipping some more of Erik's illicit coffee, manufactured direct from beans lifted out of the stores by Erik that morning. He loves his morning coffee. It takes some time to cook over his tin mug, but it is none the less fragrant, and very much better — owing to a more generous use of the coffee bean — than the weak stuff we get from the steward.

It is *Kristi Himmelsfarsdagen* (Ascension Day) and a holiday for all of us. We three are describing to each other places of interest we have visited.

'It's no use,' laughs Bertil. 'Erik has too much in his head and can't get it out quickly enough.'

Erik looks from one to the other indignantly.

'You are not believing me?' he demands.

'Yes, certainly we believe you,' we tell him. 'But for gawd's sake slow down a bit. We——'

'Garddam barll'cks,' gasps Erik, as we are greeted by a terrific crash at the cabin door. Gösta enters, gasping and almost falling over himself in excitement.

'Andrastyrman are *sjuck*,' he splutters.

'Amen,' I murmur.

'Hope he are dying,' says Erik.

'That he may be buried on a warm night in a salt meat barrel,' finishes Bertil, in funereal tones. 'What's the matter with him, Puka?'

'Fever. He sleep here on deck last night v'en he have too much varm. Now in boonk, very plenty too much varm. Dat peeg stooard say he have so varm, hundred-and-four.'

'Who are telling you dis, Puka?' asks Erik.

'I stand by de v'yle v'en stooard tell kapten.'

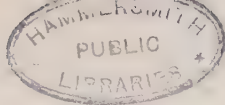
'Who is going to take starboard watch?'

'First mate.'

'Cheers for us, Gösta,' I cry, overjoyed at the prospect. The chief's great aim in life is to do nothing to-day he can possibly put off till to-morrow.

'Steeboard vatch don't no vork more,' says Gösta, passing out to run the news to the rest of the boys.

(The Editor of that striking journal *The Barometer* asks me to announce to Russell and neighbourhood that he hopes next issue to include a passionate poem by the ship's bard. He tells me it is a poem with a plea, written in haste, and called, 'Hope He Dies.')



## C H A P T E R X

ONCE more our sails belly from their yards and the ship bends to port under the north-east breath. Once more I am compelled to upset my bunk and transfer my pillow to the opposite end – my bunk being cross-rigged. It is only on such occasions that my bed ever gets turned over for an airing. In ordinary circumstances it stays put. I roll the blankets off when I climb out, and roll them on again when I climb in. I am past caring about hygiene – the ozone preserves my health. What is the use of caring? My bed is lousy and will remain lousy until I vacate it forever. Airing and attempted delousing make no difference – I have never known anything cling so tenaciously as these little Finnish fellows. And if I scrubbed everything for a whole day and followed the scrubbing with a whole tin of Keating's, I would smell just as strongly of Stockholm tar as I do this minute. What is more, I don't *want* to be any different. I have come to wrinkle my nose contentedly at the careless air surrounding me. I do not want to be clean. I am taking a whole-hearted childish delight in being dirty and smelly. As a golden-

haired, apple-cheeked, velvet-knicker-bockered boy with long curls, I always wanted to be dirty and smelly, and that tendency was systematically checked. This is the first real abandon I have known. Henceforth while I am in this ship and this bunk, I shall feel lost without such an air to follow me about. I feel as strongly about this as the sailor who wept when somebody trod on his pet cockroach which used to come out at seven-thirty every evening and flick his feelers in friendly salutation. One seems to get that way. Santy – one of our aristocratic wind-jammerians who spends half his time, when at home, in dress-clothes – has confided that the reason he loves the ship is that here he may move freely among society without first dropping into a scented bath and plastering himself with pretty-pretties whenever he moves from his bunk. A little goes a long way, he remarked.

The breath from the starboard is definitely the north-east trade wind and, although the sun shines strongly still, there comes the suggestion of a nip in the air at nights, while across the rig and the canvas, the wind wails like an angry chorus of white-clad spinsters performing the 'Hallelujah Chorus.'

The steward has killed one of the pigs. He shot it with a revolver, and then held a dish under the dying wretch's dripping neck. That night

our dinner consisted of pig's-blood pancakes, the vilest stuff that has ever been put before me as food. The Finns revelled in the mess.

*'Ich bin satt!'* said Gösta, after eating my share as well as his own.

For two days after the massacre of the pig half of us were sick owing to the unaccustomed richness of the pork.

The skipper is the barometer still. One feels that things are going well once more at sight of him with thumbs linked in braces and fingers extended, chest out like that of a pouter pigeon, and distended nostrils joyfully sniffing the breeze. He has taken to prodding the pig again – the poor, solitary, lonely pig. Whenever the Captain is in high spirits he prods the pig or slaps him on the pork, and grins delightedly to see him scamper away along the deck. One lives and learns. I never realised, until it was pointed out to me by the captain, that you can convince a pig black is white if you but scratch his left ear. A pig has a perfect passion for being scratched on his left ear. Slap him on the rump and he will never trust you again, but scratch his ear and he is a friend for aye.

The skipper is anxious again. He stands by the wheel giving directions to the helmsman. Steering seems greater fun now, and I am growing to like the job. There is a thrill in holding the

ship straight with a fair sea running and the yards close-hauled, steering without the compass and with only a faint tremor in the upper windward corners of the sails to act as guide to the course. If you go too close to the wind it may blow back into the sails and stop the ship or turn her about, and if you don't go close enough to the wind, you are liable to lose valuable speed. It is an acquired trick – difficult to seize when the skipper stands beside you doing nothing beyond ask you, in the name of the deity, if you can't keep her full; plead with you, for the sake of the deity, to leave out some of the curves; threaten you, before sight of the deity, with strangulation if you don't bloodywell ease her over; and leave you, to the mercy of the deity, unhappy in the knowledge that a poor bloody worm would wriggle to death trying to follow you.

But it is something different to the other work of the ship. That requires only brawn, but steering requires a mixture of brawn and brain. It is, to my mind, the only real remaining shred of romance about the old romantic wind-jammer. It is the thrill of driving a big racing car over a difficult track. The only trouble is that you have no accelerator.

It has taken me upwards of five weeks to carve my name on the wheel, the reason being that I have been hampered both by necessity to rotate



the wheel and by the presence nearby of the officers. Bill Felstead, an Australian, was a year ahead of me on this ship, carved his name on the wheel and the fore topmast. I have carved my name below his in each case. I feel this is only a fair thing to do since he was there first. The wheel is adorned with a weird assortment of names, such as:

‘Y.N. – Sundsvall. S.V. Dagys (19–). Lietuva – Lithuania. Vilho – Ha . . . vilahl. S.S. Solius – Helsingfors. J. P. Rodgers. Nils Panss . . . G. V. S. Söderhund. E. Salenius (in four different places). V. H. P.L-S. Skane – Sweden. Emil Hirschlund. Kirkswind. A.V.A. Felstead. Kannas. M-N-Nen. Hallula. Johan PH – 60. Lubirath. Stahl Silius – Helsingfors. Ejnar. Edberg.’ And a hundred others, many half-scraped away from the teak. I feel I am gazing on the ghosts of picaroons as I look on these names. What an amazingly interesting collection of short stories here for the imagination! See the bold, careless way those two bare initials are slashed into the teak! One pictures a tall, fearless fellow who cared not a tinker’s benediction for anybody – who lived roughly and loved roughly and sent a dainty heart a-flutter in every port he visited. Down there is another name, this time carved in high letters with meticulous care. Before my vision stands a short sailor, a man

without any eyebrows, who endeavours to cloak his mediocrity behind a name which would suit a colossus. On and on and on they go, filing past the mind's eye, all their cards on the table under the keenness of the penetrating eye which examines their work. The way a boy carves his initials in his school-desk may be taken as the truest indication of what he will become. So the way the sailor leaves his mark on the wheel shows exactly what he has been.

Time passes quickly over the fascinating study of these short stories, the endeavour to keep the ship straight, the alluring sight of the bounding waves outside, and the occasional glimpses of the hopeful northern horizon as the ship plunges forward and the sails rise and belly before the strong breeze. Romance is coming to the trip as the end approaches. There is a steady list of some fifteen degrees to port and the north-east trade grows in strength. We are logging two hundred miles a day and more. Waves are encroaching on the decks again, and we are putting on more clothes and adding our half-forgotten oilskins and laughing at the waves.

Northward through the North Atlantic, spreading the sea into white foam by day and showering phosphorescence by night as our blunt bows cut steadily through. Freshness in the air, the sun

on high – fragrance of England in blossom-time.  
Northward to Europe! Homeward bound——

\* \* \*

As the result of a juicy idea in the mind of the chief mate, our enormous carpenter has been set the back-breaking task of hand-planing the poop deck. It is a terrific job. After the first day at it, working unceasingly under the very nose of the captain, the unfortunate fellow planed about six square feet. London expressed the opinion that the carpenter's hands were much too hard that night to clasp them in prayer – except possibly an urgent plea to the Almighty to sink the ship, or to be given strength to jump overboard and swim to Africa where such things as planing poop decks are unknown.

The chief mate is now our master, Andrastyrman being yet too weak from fever to carry on. The chief, in spite of his pugilistic nose and taurine voice, is a very amiable chap. Freed from the pragmatistical methods of Andrastyrman, whose capacity for taking unnecessary pains is infinite, our watch is doing twice as much work in half the time, and taking pleasure in doing it. Why on earth do so many people who gain authority become in consequence so intolerant and intolerable? Andrastyrman is almost a pleasant young man away from the atmosphere of work and superintendency. But as soon as he assumes his

silly little cap of authority he loses all sense of decency and balance.

It is a great regret to me that I was not assigned to the port watch when I joined the ship. I should have enjoyed everything so much more. Ever since the chief sidled up to me at the wheel and demanded, 'Who speak de best English – me or de second?' I have liked him. He speaks in a voice several degrees gruffer than nature designed it – the same trait as exists in nearly all the north-erners aboard. The gruffer the voice, and the better it can make itself heard to the exclusion of all other voices, the greater seems to be the status of its owner. It is a rib-tickling sight to watch the chief mate and Andrastyрман standing two feet apart in argument, each well-night bursting his lungs to out-shout the other. It is like watching two little boys who meet outside a shop window, while their respective mothers are separately looking for Christmas bargains, and blow their trumpets at each other in a mutual effort at intimidation. It is a variation of the 'mine-is-better'n-yourn' spirit.

We are now contentedly at work painting the iron about the quarterdeck, and making everything look clean and pretty in preparation for coming to port. Even the poor old clogged wash-room has been cleared out and painted. For, of course, the dear old ship must look spick-and-

span when she comes into port, so that the dear old visitors may be shown over to admire the fine conditions under which the modern sailor goes before the mast! It would never do for the Old-Salt-Now-Living-In-His-Flagstoned-Cottage-By-The-Sea to come aboard and get bogged in the filth and squalor. No! He must see everything when it is clean and shining, so that he might shake his shaggy goatee and soliloquise sadly, with 'Ah! Things were not like this in the Good Old Days. Now sir, when *I* was before the mast back in eighty——'

The captain is cutting a new storm-sail from a roll of brand new canvas, while the barque moves onward through the eastern fringe of the Sargasso Sea. Brand new canvas is not easily handled, and when he has cut two pieces and places them together to find that they do not fit, he curses violently:

'Bastard! Didn't I tell you you came from China!'

This queer ejaculation is the Old Man's favourite form of damning people and things. I think he must have picked up the expression in America.

\* \* \*

Andrastyрман is about again – a very subdued man. He treats us easily, and I have become the white-haired boy of the watch. I put this

down to two reasons. The first is that these men are very impressionable, and a rumour has flown across the ship that I am a very rich young fellow who signed on for sheer devilment. Both the chief and Andrastyrman have been trying to pump me about my pseudo-fabulous bank balance, and I have remained perfectly non-committal about it. They seem to take it for granted that I am lousy with money. I should have laughed a swift denial, had I not seen through the pumping that they hold money to be the force of temporal power. Now I am allowed to take odd moments off so that I might gratify any whim that comes to me. I am allowed to smoke and wander at will. I am granted the run of the chart-room and the officers' quarters. Nobody seems to be out to deny me anything. I would be a damned fool if I didn't take advantage of it.

The other reason for the change in Andrastyrman's front is my typewriter, which I occasionally lend to him. He treats it still with the affection of a child for a favourite toy, never having been privileged to play with one before he and I met. If there is anything I want I have only to bribe Andrastyrman with my typewriter, and he becomes as clay in my hands. Such is the power of wealth and ownership!

I am having the time of my life. Knowledge



that we are close to home, although yet several thousands of miles from it, is having its effect. Even Erik is glad it will soon be over.

‘If we keep up this speed,’ I said to him this morning, ‘we shall be in Queenstown quicker than——’

‘A mid-summer night’s short time,’ he interposed rudely.

‘What is that, Erik?’ I asked innocently, never having heard the expression.

He has given me thirty-seven graphic accounts. Erik knows everything.

\* \* \*

Twenty-two pairs of eyes gaze out to port on the south-western horizon. The dark blob there is a ship, steaming northward, and the unspoken question in every mind aboard the *Archibald Russell* is ‘Will she see or heed us?’ We do not expect that every tin-pot ship should journey twenty miles out of her course to greet us – thereby losing a valuable hour of her time – or take a message from us, or see whether we have sufficient food and water aboard; but in our isolation we cannot help thinking that the ships of some nations lack the courtesy of the sea. Dammit, there are only a bare dozen of the old square-riggers going round the Horn these days. It does not fall to the lot of every ship to sight one of the old warriors. So

many ships have passed us in the night, and others in the day, but they have not spoken to us in passing.

It is the eighty-first sailing day. We awoke this morning to find ourselves under that mild, salubrious sun which gives Madeira's grapes their renowned flavour. I was glad to be on the dawn watch, as it gave me another of those unforgettable glimpses of the birth of day. It was another golden morning when the dawn came up like thunder to introduce to us a sun as elegant as a glowing sovereign fresh from the mint. Never have I seen anything more full of colour than when the North Atlantic sun stands on the rim of the world at daybreak. This sun is a different fellow from the tyrant who bore down on us in the Tropics. He is tempered by a pleasant strong breeze, still from the north-east, although we are now above the trade wind belt. We are ploughing steadily through the Horse Doldrums, so named because a sailing ship bearing a large consignment of valuable blood stock from South America to Spain was becalmed so long in these latitudes that food and water were exhausted, and the horses perished.

Our rate of progress is slow – between four and five knots – but the weather is so mildly perfect, and the long passage so near its close, that nobody minds the slackening of speed. Even

London is gay, and that says much for the atmosphere in the f'c'sle.

I took the wheel the first hour of this afternoon's watch. While I was there the skipper came out from the chart-room and stood close to the wheel observing the course and the sails. As he gazed from compass to canvas, and from canvas back to compass, he puffed a cigarette and hummed a tune – the first sign of music he has displayed in eleven and a half weeks.

'Only two points vester dan I wanted to go,' he told me. 'Now it's getting round to de course I vant, nort'-east-by-east.'

He was in conversational mood and rambled on about ships and the sea. He cursed the Great War which sank so many of the old sailors and put the final tin-lid on their career. He sailed all through it and was never torpedoed, but that was only by good luck. Sometimes the crews were allowed to take to the boats before their ships were torpedoed or bombed, he said, but many were not.

'Dey sank some of de best bitches afloat,' he murmured sadly.

There is one thing about skipper S. that I admire more than another. His heart is in his ship. He has told me that if it were not for the money – necessary to him as a working man – he would never sail under steam. He pooh-poohed

my suggestion that it might be wise to equip the sailors with auxiliary engines to carry them quickly and safely through the doldrums. A sailing ship with an engine wasn't a sailing ship at all, he said scornfully.

Soon after coffee, as we hammered and scraped and painted and oiled, a speck appeared over the crest of the south-west.

And now twenty-two pairs of eyes are watching it grow larger and larger. Bertil, gazing through a pair of long-range field glasses, gives a shout:

'Christ, boys! She's turning. Oh, by God, she's turning. She's seen us and is coming over!'

We surround him, demanding the glasses. One by one we have a look at this precious sight. Sure enough her bows are now in our direction, cutting a deep and rapid path through the waves. She is a big ship. Speculation is rife as to her nationality. Who is this breaking her course to pay her respects to a damned old barge that can't do more than five knots? Who is the gentleman? Or rather, the lady?

'*Förbannat!* She's a Swede,' claims Bertil.

'Blimey, she's British,' retorts Jack London.

'*Perkela! Det skepp är Finska,*' bawls Gösta.

'All bloody wrong, she's Australian,' I contradict, pathetically loyal to the last.

'Mook'n Faderland!' Erik has the last word, as usual.

Whatever she is, she's got grace and courtesy that strike joy into the hearts of two at least. I have never seen delight written so plainly on a man's face as on London's this moment, and I don't remember when I felt such relief myself.

She is heading astern of us, and is evidently going to cut across behind. As she turns a flag shows aft, and fairly soon we can make out the flag of England. Good old England! Jack London and I exchange a glance, but say nothing. I know what is in his heart, and he knows what is in mine. National sentiment has never bubbled very strongly in me before, but then it never has had a chance. Certainly never a chance like this. It is a sight to make any man proud to be of British stock — a sight a lonely Englishman might never forget. She is the Royal Mail Packet Liner *Camito*, a big spick-and-span grey ship cutting a white-crested course over a blue ocean with the flag of her country floating proudly astern. By now we have hoisted the flag of Finland. In my hand is clutched a cablegram, wrapped up and containing money and a request that it be despatched at the first port. If the *Camito* comes near enough I shall throw it over on to her deck. Somebody might pick it up——

She comes behind us, letting her speed run down to a little above ours. As she approaches

we are hoisting flag signals, telling our name, our owner, our port, our length of passage, and requesting her to pass on these details to Lloyd's. She signals with her flags that she has noted our message and will report, hoists a Finnish flag, and then blows us a 'good-luck-and-quick-passage' siren.

I see all this, but my attention is mostly on the faces and actions of our fellows. As the *Camito* crosses us astern and comes around to pass slowly and majestically by our starboard side, there is not a man of our crew, judging by their faces, who would not readily heave himself overboard and clamber towards the visitor. There may be officers somewhere about that big ship over there – there may be men. But we have no eyes for them. We are gazing up at the passenger deck, along the railing of which are girls, elegantly-dressed, handsome, smiling – girls of all nations – girls to suit every taste! They have cameras out and are taking snapshots. Our crew are shinning up the shrouds, performing monkey tricks in the rig, and striking attitudes, each one of us hoping that he is being photographed by the girl that takes his fancy. If one of those girls put out in a boat and came across to us, we would all hang by the necks until we were dead when we reached port. Our remarks are foul and ungentlemanly. Only the extraordinary



situation in which we are placed could justify our behaviour. Fortunately the ships are not lying close enough for any of our remarks to be overheard. Erik has mentally undressed every girl along the railing. We are gazing at the people of the other ship as children might gaze on their first sight of the Zoo's household – like dumb animals at first sight of human beings. Heroes, eh? Good God, we look it!

And what are the *Camito* passengers thinking about us! A dirty, unwashed, dishevelled little crowd of hulking wretches confronts them. Heaven knows what they think. I know what I should think. Feeling as I do now, I should cast a glance of pity on the men. As for the ship, I would fit her with a gyro compass and let her sail around in harmless circles until she became giddy. Then I would send her scooting past every horrible nightmarish cape and protuberance in the world. Finally I would set her course for the Sargasso Sea, pray for doldrums, and then jump overboard and swim for the nearest island. This would give me unbounded delight, but of course, I am slightly biassed.



## C H A P T E R   X I

*Sondag*, the ninety-first sailing day out from Melbourne, and a fresh June morning.

Six days ago Pittson came crashing along the deck like an animated tank, except that with one hand he clutched the seat of his trousers and with the other waved wildly to port.

'T'ree-mast barque! *Penang*! Hundred-tventy *dagen* from Port Lincoln!'

Jack London and I were on the foredeck, doing a spot of barbering, and getting thoroughly worked up about it. There being no barber aboard, our hair was in a shocking state, and London had agreed to have a hack at mine if I did something to his. He certainly had a hack at mine. With a pair of blunt, salt-encrusted scissors he managed to hack away a fair amount of hair, a few slices of ear, and several chunks of neck. After that he became my victim. I tied an old shirt round his neck, bared my teeth, brandished the weapon, and vigorously attacked his jet-black locks. London's hair resembles a box-thorn hedge in its unwillingness to be pruned. I was enthusiastically converting him into a cross between a gaol-bird and Moses, and he was

getting very angry as I laughed at the effect of my handiwork.

At Pittson's cry, however, we started up. Any diversion that comes our way is hailed with delight. The hair-cutting could wait. Following Pittson's directions we made out the blurred shape of another set of tall sails port for'ard. I raced aft and the skipper was good enough to lend me his glass. This has only a small field but is very powerful, and it brought the other ship quite close. She must have been some twenty miles to westward of us, as only her sails were visible, her hulk being hidden by the waves which rose on the horizon.

It was impossible for the skipper to restrain his great joy at catching the other.

'Bloody *Penang*,' he chuckled. 'She left Australia a mont' ahead of us. Soon she'll be a mont' behind us.'

'How on earth can you tell it is *Penang* at this distance?' I asked curiously. 'You can't even see her hulk.'

'She's de only t'ree-masted barque on dis run vit' her kind of rig,' he answered.

As far as I could make out, the *Penang* appeared to be skipping along at the same pace as the *Archibald Russell*; but of course the Old Man was right. By five that afternoon the *Penang* was nearer to our longitude, but well back in latitude. She lay

across the path of the setting sun, and seemed strangely, piteously symbolic of her race. Vanishing, on the horizon – the horizon of the setting sun. An inspiring picture on the horizon, sails a-gleam and almost golden in that bright patch of sunlight, masts bending under the weight of wind-filled canvas. A curse forever, but still a thing of beauty! If the vanishing race of square-riggers could but pause there like that for all to see her distant beauty – always in the path of the setting sun – people like Jack London and me would never have to look back on them bitterly, with the bitterness of disappointment and disillusionment. They have done much for us, these ships. Our fathers built the Empire with them; our sanctified admirals fought and won the world's most famous sea battles in them; our scientists made invaluable voyages and discoveries with their aid; they taught us that the world was round instead of being flat. It is a great pity to remember them as Jack London and I shall remember them. I am jealous that any other country has been allowed to take possession of them.

A score of years ago the Seven Seas abounded with barques and barquentines, clippers and schooners. To-day most of them that are left sail the Baltic, and that only in the summer months. Their trade routes can be counted

without exhausting the fingers of one hand. Their usefulness other than for training purposes is gone, their glory is a confined thing, and slowly but surely the waves are claiming them.

The great Australian Grain Race – that grand, fearless struggle to be first to Europe with the season's grain – is but a dejected shadow of what it was twenty, fifteen years ago. In another five – possibly ten – years there will be no high sails to span the horizon – nothing but their ghosts to bend before the whining Westerlies, to race madly through the Roaring Forties – nothing but the ghosts of dead ships to fling themselves recklessly into the waves and along those familiar, trackless courses. 'The only three-masted barque on this run with her kind of rig!' A curse forever, but still things of beauty – and individuality.

Who are they that take our place? Those colossal, mobile, standardised intruders, with no tall masts, no yards, no shrouds, no rig, no sail? Those scorners that race by with smoke belching forth in clouds from squat chimneys sitting back so damnably smug, with some hidden devil's device astern churning the ocean into anger? Those relentless monsters that sweep us aside and sink us in their wash? Has romance gone from the sea, that we should be sold like slaves away from the homes whence we were launched? Is there nothing more of the glory of the sea,

that we should be sold away to rot and sink without any children to take our place? Is there nought but soulless standardisation? Is romance dead?

Fear not, brave tall ships! Your ghosts will stay with us, even though your children do not. We may build our standardised ships – send you unsung to your graves – but we do not bury romance with you. For we, like you, are but parts of this great romance – here for a brief, hectic moment. Our world is becoming standardised, too. We have our crowded hour of glorious life, just like you, and then we, too, are gone. Too late we remember it. There is no going back over the course. We are all but infinitesimal parts in the great romance of the world. We also shall creep unsung to our sad graves. Romance lies not in any one style or period. Romance is the world – our birth, our life, and our death. It does not die with the clippers and barques and brigs and barquentines – any more than it fades from us with the passing of our clubs and skins, doublet and hose, frills and laces, wasp waists and high busts.

The magic lies in Nature. In the sea and the land and the sky. Ships may pass in the night, and speak to each other in passing; but it is the ocean that provides the meeting place. And whether it be you, or those great monsters that



so scornfully sweep you aside, the sea will not pause in its great metronome. For the sea 'drowns out humanity and time . . . It belongs to eternity, and of that it sings its monotonous song for ever and ever. . . .'

*Sondag*, the ninety-first sailing day out from Melbourne Heads, and a fresh June morning.

Never before has the world seemed so much the best of all possible worlds as on this morning. There is no work, and even if it were not a Sunday morning, there would still be no work. Not content with arranging that meeting with the *Penang*, the sea has borne us on to another set of sails, and we are rapidly overtaking them. Erik, Bertil, London, Pittson, Zetty, Putte, Einar, Gösta, and I are up on the f'c'sle watching this stranger who is lolloping along in a zig-zag course about ten miles ahead.

We now feel that it actually is a race – the 1929 Australian Grain Race. Other ships have gone before us and, according to the Old Man, they should have reached port weeks ago. *Beatrice*, *Herzogin Cecilie*, *Lawhill* – these are the pride of to-day's fleet, these are the ones who still set out from down south with the old-time cry of 'home under ninety days.' *Archibald Russell*? Oh, dear, no! She could never do it. She could never beat the fleet home. Idling away those long days in the doldrums, we felt it was only too

true. But now our pulses are beating with a different measure. We have passed one of the competitors, left her far behind. Now we are about to pass another. Will there be others ahead, that we might pass those, too?

The weather to-day is sharp and clear. We are nearing Ireland, and the sea is smoother. The proximity to land has taken some of the wind from our sails. But who in hell cares about that? Two or three days more, and by Jove! I shall win my bet with Nils.

The officers and boys were painting their cabins, and I was setting my things in order ready for going ashore at Queenstown, when the captain let out a whoop from the poop deck. He had his glass trained on a point some twenty degrees to starboard of our course which, by the compass, was *ost-sud-ost-halv-ost*. He gazed thus for two or three minutes, put up the glass, and gave expression to something resembling a snort.

‘Whoa! Bloody *Mozart!*’ he cried, calling the chief mate and handing over the glass.

Out we rushed with Bertil’s field-glasses——

Ahead of us lies the four-masted Finnish barquentine *Mozart*, formerly a Frenchman. She left South Australia on the same day as the *Penang*—one month before we set sail. ‘Christ! What a time those poor devils aboard must have had,’ we keep repeating to each other.

The *Mozart* is being carried along by the square-rigged sails on her foremast, her inner jibs, and her staysails. Her fore-and-aft canvas which is carried by the other three masts rests on the booms, rendered useless to her in the tail wind that blows. She is making only a third of our speed. By lunch-time she is barely two miles in front.

She looks a glorious picture with her broad cross sails gleaming whitely in contrast to her black hull against the clear blue sky. Her masts, as tall as ours, reach up to a great height as we see them, and sway gracefully before the breeze. Now she has set her mainsail to keep her by the wind while we draw up. We shall pass her on her starboard side.

We go down for a hasty lunch, and when this is finished, we are almost level with the *Mozart*. How I am cursing that blasted wave down by Cape Horn that swamped me and my camera while I wasn't looking! The camera is now like a disused salt-cellar. Everything is salted together, and I am missing the picture of a lifetime. If only the damned thing were operating now, I could shin up the mainmast and get a wonderful picture of the *Mozart* from our royal yard.

Bertil is our crack helmsman and takes great pride in the fact. He has gone to the wheel, to steer a fine course as though the ship were on rails. The *Mozart* comes around in a beautiful sweeping

semi-circle, so that for a few moments she stands parallel with us, and barely fifty yards away.

Somebody from our crew – now packed along the port side – calls on us. We respond with healthy lungs.

‘Three cheers for *Mozart!*’

‘Hurrah! Hurrah! HURRAH!’

The voices echo strangely across the deep water separating us. And from the other side is heard:

‘Three cheers for *Archibald Russell!*’

‘Hurrah! Hurrah! HURRAH-AH-AH-AH-AH——!’

Splendid sight! Splendid sound! I am thankful that I have lived to see anything so beautiful and inspiring. Would that we might lie like this and race side by side into port, the best man to take the laurels. There is real sadness in the eyes of every man of us that the meeting is so short.

Meanwhile our flags are shooting up and down in signalled messages.

‘Which port are you making?’ asks *Mozart*.

‘Queenstown,’ we reply. ‘And you?’

‘The same,’ she signals.

‘How many days have you?’ we flag.

‘From Wallaroo, 117 days,’ she replies.

‘From Williamstown, 91 days,’ we tell her, in reply to her question.

‘I hope we shall meet in Queenstown,’ says *Mozart*.

'You might be there before us,' is the modest reply the Old Man sends up on our bunting.

By this time we have passed. I run up to the poop, anxious not to miss anything of the excitement. The captain is looking back at the *Mozart*, grinning with delight, but with the accustomed curse on his lips:

'Bastard! Didn't I tell you ve vas in a hurry!'

'That was a great sight, captain,' I say.

'Goddam de luck,' he cries. 'I vas going to talk to him, but ve passed him so dam' qvick I didn't get de chance.'



## C H A P T E R   X I I

'FINNISH peoples not care for not'ing. Dey tell de captain rough 'ords. Dey make trouble against you, an' trouble against me, an' den trouble against all de ot'er boys. Svedish boy make trouble and. You see, t'ree mont's out here' – the speaker sweeps the horizon – 'no newspapers, no good food, no not'ing and. Everybody is crazy. Dat is v'y sailors are de baddest peoples.'

It is morning, very early and very misty. Ireland is about ten miles ahead. Nils and the Frog and I are on the f'c'sle, looking out for land. I have already seen about a dozen things that look like land. I can hardly control myself. Mechanically I say to Nils:

'What would you do, then? Scrap all the sailing ships?'

'*Nez,*' he answers. 'Dey should be for naughty boys. Put naughty boys on dis trip, so den dey are naughty no more.'

He goes off into a lengthy string of curses about the ship.

'What about you?' I turn to the Frog. 'You seem to have had a bellyful this trip. Are you



finished with sailing ships, too? Will you ever go to sea again?’

‘No!’ he answers emphatically. ‘Or maybe yes. I dunno. I see. Maybe I stay ashore, if ze Bank of England open for me. If not——’ an expressive shrug.

Slowly the time passes. I am policeman, and it is my turn to look out for Ireland. We are supposed to be heading for Fastness Rock. When we see this we must turn along and hug the shore until we come to the harbour entrance. I am well primed by the skipper. Nils and the Frog are as excited as I, and have come out to help me look for that promised land, although they will not be allowed ashore at Queenstown. The ship may anchor inside the harbour, and lie thus for seven days free of harbour dues while she gets her orders, unbends trade sails and bends storm sails for the rougher northern winds, and attends to other small jobs that are best done in port. This is a customary courtesy. But none of the crew may go ashore. The captain, of course, may do so, and anybody else to whom special permission is given. The skipper certainly would not trust any of the others ashore. They would immediately jump the ship and never come back, and he might be held up here for some time before he could get another crew, thereby running his owner into expense. The

captain knows pretty well that the slightest laxity on his part would leave him without a crew. He has not always been a captain. Once upon a time he was himself before the mast. He has told me that for five years, as a younger man, he sailed under wild-voiced skippers, jumped every ship he signed on, and went without the pay to which he was entitled. That is the way they did things in those good old days. The captains used to train themselves to be regular devils. It saved them a good deal in wages.

But although Nils and the Frog may not go ashore until they reach the port to which the grain in our holds is consigned, they are as keen as I to sight the first land since we left Melbourne fourteen weeks ago.

‘What will you do when you come ashore, Nils,’ I ask, after the Frog has gone aft to relieve the helmsman.

‘At ’ill I do?’ he echoes. He pulls out a pipe and contentedly sinks his broad behind on a bollard. He looks at me for a full minute, and then lights his pipe. How many times has this scene been enacted and re-enacted! He speaks slowly, the words tumbling out by twos and threes

‘I have——t’enty-five——whillings——in my chest——and ’en I come to port——I am going to eat up it!’

. . . At some filthy little brothel in Antwerp,

Marseilles, Liverpool, Hamburg? Oh romantic, Nils – so romantic! Dear old Nils. Dear old nought-caring sailor.

The mist is clearing, but is still heavy on the north-western horizon, where lie those gorgeous green hills, not so far away.

At last bells. My turn at the wheel – the last! Nils, who now takes over the *utkik*, chimes the bells. I go aft to relieve the Frog. The skipper is on the poop, and a big grin is on the Frog. He gives me the course.

‘Ze compass ’e will not sit still, and ze capitaine say ’e dance ze fandango ’cause ’e is coming to port,’ he tells me.

For the next sixty minutes I have a great old farewell game with the wheel. It is like trying to embark a jumping-jack on the Great Circle. We are doing this last lap in record time – a rollicking twelve knots. Out of the starboard mist looms a German tramp. I make out the name *Electricity*. Ironical that, for we are passing it in a flash. Oh God, this is great. Romance? Yes, I feel even romantic about it all at this minute. Reaction more than romance, if I care to analyse the emotion. Reaction from relief. Ireland, oh thank God!

The skipper goes down for morning coffee. He returns fifteen minutes later. For fifteen minutes the compass-point has been almost dead on

course. Just as the skipper comes out off goes the jumping-jack again, shooting wildly eastwards – more than half a point out of course. My tormentor comes over simultaneously to have a glance.

‘Hullo, dere she goes again,’ he says cheerfully. ‘V’ere you taking us dis time?’

‘Look here, captain, the game’s not fair,’ I protest. ‘She’s been dead on course while you’ve been away, and the minute you arrive something goes wrong. It invariably does. Have you got a magnetic horse-shoe in your pocket for luck, or is your heart of steel? A minute ago she was way round here.’

‘Oh, don’t vorry about dat,’ he says. ‘She’ll be vay round dere again in another minute.’

Brute!

I vish I could’ve mapped your tracks for you dis trip,’ he sighs. ‘Dey vould take first prize at de maypole competition.’

Brute!

‘A bloody vorm’d break its back to follow you.’ He has said it again and again.

Brute!

‘Vould’ve been to port two weeks ago if you had left out some of de curves.’

Brute!

At last the hands of the chart-house clock give a spurt. The wheel over. A slight rest for coffee.

Just a little brace-tugging with the spray lashing our laughing faces. Vikings home from a great sea battle! Yes, I feel like a Viking again – the spirit that was in me as I helped to man the windlass that hauled up the antiquated anchor in the bay of Port Phillip fourteen weeks ago. No sea-sickness now to rob me of this great joy.

Breakfast. And after breakfast – Ireland! There it stands, solid rock. And beyond the solid rock is green, green, green. Green trees and green meadows high up beyond the rocky cliffs. Land – green, green land. We all shout for joy. *Archibald Russell's* blunt nose is dead on Galley Head. Out of the vastness, out of the mist, through countless stretches of vacant horizon – eighteen thousand long miles of horizon – and here we are, emerging from the morning mist, to point our nose straight on Galley Head, Ireland.

No more watches. We are all ordered out on deck. Free watch out. Break the *gordings*, break the buntlines! Break them to hell! Fill the tank over the donkey-room, to set the rusty engine in motion ready to lower the anchor gently over our iron sides to the keel. After that – plop! – it can rattle down by itself with its own musical sound.

Swiftly now fly the hands of the clock. Bells, bells, bells. They follow rapidly on each other's

heels. We have scrubbed the decks. Everything is in readiness for port. We sit together for lunch to the glorious cries of seagulls. Oh God! The relief!

Now we are out on deck again. Closer and closer we creep. The wind is blowing stiffly across the entrance. The Frog thinks we cannot go in with such a breeze. We must go on to Falmouth. Jack London and I heed him not. We are feasting our eyes on what lies across there. Ireland! – Fastness, Galley Head, Seven Heads, Old Head of King Sale, Roches Point, and Queenstown Harbour with its two old forts standing up solidly on either side.

Bramsson, best of all our celebrated monkeys, shins aloft to the fore topmast, and hoists the Blue Peter. We can see the pilot-boat through the glasses. As soon as he sees our signal he comes towards us. He has had reports when to expect us and was ready waiting. There is something waiting here for him. The second pig – dead! And of what he is about to receive the Lord make him very careful. It has been dead two days. The steward shot it, as he shot the other, drained its life-blood, and presented us again with those dreadful pig's-blood pancakes for dinner. Once more Gösta ate his portion and mine, and rolled into his bunk afterwards with that disgusting '*Ich bin satt!*' expression in his little round eyes. And



now the pig waits for the pilot. Another customary courtesy, this. Coming into port, a ship must kill a pig and give first taste to the pilot. After he has lunched from it, we shall dine from it and all be sick again. No! To hell with the pig. I shall eat my toast. There is a pound of porterhouse steak waiting for me up in the nearest Cobh hotel as soon as I can get ashore. Meanwhile I shall eat toast.

The pilot comes alongside and boards. As he touches our side the crew, hanging over starboard, let out three great cheers for him. He comes up, to be inundated with questions about the other ships in the Grain Race. He tells us that we have made the quickest passage. Quickest passage! Then we have won the race! The others – *Beatrice*, *Herzogin*, *Cecilie*, *Lawhill* – are in port, but we have won the race!

I have never seen a bunch of men so dementedly excited as our boys when they hear this news. I have been among the hill crowds at an Australian football final. It was like a curate's tea party compared with this.

The pilot takes control, and Bertil takes the wheel. It is a stiff tussle to get through the narrow gap into the Harbour, and we work as we have never worked before to set fast the sails at the pilot's direction. We work like tormented hell-cats. I am putting every ounce of strength I

have into this great job of coming into port. I should throw myself overboard in my excitement if I didn't have an outlet like this.

There are spells between our work and during these we watch our entrance into Cobh Harbour – it was known as Queenstown before the Free State decided to give it an original name. This I learn from one of the crew of the pilot-boat, who has come aboard, and has given Jack London and me his cigarettes – *real* cigarettes!

He tells us that Mr. Baldwin has got it in the neck, and that Mr. MacDonald is Prime Minister. He complains bitterly that things are rotten in the state of Ireland. They always were, and forever will be, he informs us. We agree, and nod our sympathy, and he goes to the pilot's boat to get us some more cigarettes. Now we can talk better. He curses the present Government, and he curses the government that went before it, and he curses in advance all future governments. Governments were always messing about and upsetting something, he complained.

At last by very clever piloting we are inside the heads, and any doubts we had are dispelled. Out to port is Temple Brady Fort, and Roches Point to starboard. Church Bay, the summer resort of fashionable Cork – on past Camden Fort, Carlisle Fort. Dotted high up along the cliff on the port side are quaint little houses and cottages

in various styles of attractive architecture, each one fronted by a garden full of bright flowers – Graball Bay with more cottages, and now cabbages, fields and fields of cabbages and cauliflowers. Not so elegant for the front garden, perhaps – but richly green, and therefore very beautiful in our eyes. Ahead is Queenstown itself, or Cobh, with the tall artistic spire of St. Colman's Cathedral jutting up in the centre. Along the short shores of the little bays with which the harbour abounds we can see people standing looking towards us and waving their handkerchiefs. The man from the pilot-boat crew tells us the people are very excited to see our arrival, for we are the first to come to Queenstown for orders this year. The others could not get into the harbour and were forced on to Falmouth. We pass Spike Island, where the political prisoners were kept during the trouble six years ago. We come opposite to a pretty little bay with a cluster of attractive multi-windowed cottages, and there is a shout from the pilot. Down anchor! We are home.

\* \* \*

It is the following evening. The sun is setting, and the green-fringed harbour of Queenstown, County Cork, is a beautiful sight. Our vanquished comrades are now lying at anchor beside us – *Mozart*, ahead and *Penang* to starboard. The

barquentine came in five hours behind us, and *Penang* followed up with a rush next morning.

The chief mate is entertaining me in his cabin. There is a bottle, now half-empty, on his table, and the chief mate and I are fast approaching a state of beastly and enviable intoxication when the captain enters and says that permission has been given for Jack London and myself to go ashore next morning, provided our passports are in order. Another glass is produced and we drink each other's health in French brandy.

'Skall,' says the skipper.

'Skall,' says the chief.

'Skall,' say I.

As we drink. The Old Man bangs his fist on the table.

'I vas in Melbourne v'en de skipper of the *Herzogin Cecilie* left Port Lincoln. He said, "Let me see de ship of dis year's grain fleet dat can beat me on time to Europe – only let me see de ship an' de captain of her." Vell, here's de ship an' here's de captain, by God!'

'Dat's him, by God!' says the chief.

'By God, it is!' I add.

We chat pleasantly for half an hour.

I promise the chief that when I have fixed up ashore I shall wait until sundown, then grab the nearest launch and scoot out to the ship, give three hoots and a whistle for him, and take him

ashore for a rollicking evening. Glibly I give him my word on it, though fully aware that my £8 10s. — now reduced to £6 owing to the purchase aboard of oilskins, seaboots, and tobacco. I have resold my sailor's gear for 7s. 6d. — would probably not even pay for the damage to the launch.

All the time I am awaiting my opportunity. I am well primed by Erik and Bertil. Presently I see my chance, and it comes off. I leave the aft quarters with a bottle of French brandy under my arm.

While we are drinking it the Frenchman enters. He does not ask for a share, but we give him a mugful. I am called away. When I return, Erik and Bertil are very excited. The bottle of brandy, three-quarters full, has mysteriously vanished from their cabin, Erik tells me. He cannot understand it, as he has not moved out of the cabin, and he left the bottle safely hidden under the table. The Frenchman was the only visitor. I'm not naturally suspicious, but——

\* \* \*

There is a small boat waiting to take us ashore. Our bags have been thrown in. Everything is ready, except——

I go to the main *skans*. Nils is sitting contentedly on his broad behind, smoking the last of my good tobacco that I had used so sparingly

throughout the trip – one pipeful every night. This morning I distributed my unwanted goods, the tobacco to Nils and the Astrakkan jacket to Yervy.

Nils looks up at me as I enter.

‘Goo-bye,’ he says simply.

‘Nils, do you know that you owe me sixpence?’ I say, determined to get a fair crack of the whip.

Without a word he goes to his chest and produces a coin. I examine it.

‘Here, old man, this is a fifty-*pienna*!’

Again he delves in his chest and this time produces sixpence.

‘Here you are. Now go . . . to hell and.’





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